Jordan: Stability Through Poverty - A Mandate Successor State Case Study

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Jordan: Stability Through Poverty - A Mandate Successor State Case Study 1
Part 1: The Ottoman Baseline and Creating a Kingdom from Nothing (Pre-1916 to ~1925) 2
A Land That Wasn't a Country 2
Life Under Ottoman Rule: The Baseline (Pre-1916) 3
WWI: Destruction, Promises, and the Arab Revolt (1914-1918) 7
Creating Transjordan: A State Nobody Wanted (1920-1925) 11
The Baseline for Independence: What Existed in 1925 15
Jordan: Stability Through Poverty - A Mandate Successor State Case Study 19
Part 2: Consolidation and Nominal Independence (1925-1950) 19
Building a State on Subsidies: The Mandate Years (1925-1946) 19
The Path to Independence: Negotiated Not Demanded (1945-1946) 24
1948: The War That Made Jordan 27
Abdullah's Assassination: The Cost of Ambition (1951) 31
The Pattern Established: How Weakness Became Strength (1920-1951) 34
What Average People Experienced: Poverty, Stability, and Subordination 36
The Baseline for the Next 70 Years: Poor, Stable, Dependent 37
Jordan: Stability Through Poverty - A Mandate Successor State Case Study 40
Part 3: Survival Through Crisis - Hussein's Long Reign (1951-1999) 40
A Teenage King Inherits a Fragile Kingdom 40
The First Crisis: Dismissing Glubb Pasha 41
Nasser's Challenge and Hussein's Repression 42
The Iraqi Revolution and Jordan's Isolation 45
The 1967 War: Losing Half the Kingdom 47
Black September: The Civil War That Revealed Who Really Ruled Jordan 50
The Oil Boom Years: Prosperity Through Others' Wealth 55
The Collapse: When External Conditions Turned 57
The Gulf War Miscalculation: Isolation and Its Price 59
Recovery Through Realignment: The Price of Survival 60
Hussein's Death and His Successor: Continuity of System 62
Jordan: Stability Through Poverty - A Mandate Successor State Case Study 64
Part 4: Contemporary Jordan - Permanent Crisis, Relative Stability (1999-2025) 64
Abdullah II: Inheriting the System, Preserving the Pattern 64
The 2011 Arab Spring: Surviving Through Calibrated Repression and Tactical Concessions 66
The Syrian Refugee Crisis: Absorbing a Million People Without Collapse 68
Economic Stagnation and Youth Unemployment: The Permanent Crisis 70
Water Crisis: Running Dry in the Desert 72
American Aid: The Permanent Subsidy 74
Contemporary Jordan: The System Persists 75
Why Jordan Survived When Wealthier Neighbors Collapsed 77
The Unanswerable Question: Can This Continue? 79
Conclusion: The Mandate's Legacy in 2025 81

Part 1: The Ottoman Baseline and Creating a Kingdom from Nothing (Pre-1916 to ~1925)

A Land That Wasn't a Country

In 1914, there was no Jordan. There was no Transjordan. There was no political entity, no administrative unit, no people who called themselves Jordanian. What existed was a stretch of territory east of the Jordan River—mostly desert, some agricultural land in the northwest, a few small towns, and Bedouin tribes who moved seasonally across landscapes that empires had drawn borders through without asking their permission.

The Ottoman Empire called this region part of the Vilayet of Syria, with smaller portions falling under the administration of distant Damascus. The people who lived here didn't think of themselves as belonging to a distinct territory. They were Arabs, Muslims (mostly Sunni with Christian minorities), members of specific tribes or town communities, subjects of the Ottoman Sultan who was also the Caliph of Islam. Their identities were tribal, religious, local—never national in the way Europeans understood nationhood.

A Bedouin family grazing sheep near the town of Karak in 1914 would have recognized the Ottoman government's authority in the abstract—taxes were collected, young men were sometimes conscripted, disputes that couldn't be resolved tribally might go to Ottoman courts in Damascus or Jerusalem. But Ottoman authority was distant, often weak, negotiated through tribal sheikhs who held real power on the ground. The family's loyalty was to their sheikh, their tribe, their immediate community. The Sultan in Istanbul was a remote figure commanding theoretical allegiance but limited practical control over daily life.

This was not a wealthy place. The soil was thin except in river valleys. Rainfall was unpredictable. Most people survived through subsistence agriculture where water existed, pastoralism in the desert regions, or small-scale trade. The great cities of the Arab world—Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, Baghdad—were elsewhere. This was periphery, not center. Life was hard, often precarious, but communities had survived here for centuries with their own rhythms, their own authorities, their own ways of organizing society.

By 1925, everything had changed. That Bedouin family now lived in a place called the Emirate of Transjordan, ruled by a Hashemite emir named Abdullah who had arrived from Mecca via a failed military campaign in Syria. They were subjects of a new state that hadn't existed a decade earlier, carved out of Ottoman provinces by British officials drawing lines on maps in Cairo and London. The British called this a mandate—a "sacred trust of civilization" to prepare backward peoples for self-government. The reality was a client state created to serve British strategic interests in the Middle East, given to a displaced Arabian prince as consolation prize for his family's service during the war.

This is the story of how Jordan was invented, how it survived against all odds, and why—alone among the mandate successor states—it achieved stability despite desperate poverty. It is a story of artificial borders, external dependence, authoritarian rule, and elite bargains that kept a weak state functioning when stronger neighbors collapsed into violence. It is a story that begins with Ottoman collapse and a promise of Arab independence that became, instead, another exercise in European imperial control.

Life Under Ottoman Rule: The Baseline (Pre-1916)

Administrative Reality: Distance from Power

The territory that would become Transjordan was administratively marginal to the Ottoman Empire. The main population centers—Amman was a small town of perhaps 2,000-3,000 people, Salt had 8,000-10,000, Karak 10,000-12,000, Irbid similar—were under the nominal authority of the Vilayet of Syria headquartered in Damascus. The southernmost regions, including Aqaba and Ma'an, fell under the Vilayet of Hejaz, administered from Medina.

Ottoman governance in these areas was light and often ineffective. Tax collection was irregular. Military presence was minimal—small garrisons in major towns, occasionally reinforced when Bedouin tribes raided settled areas or when inter-tribal warfare threatened order. Justice was theoretically administered through Ottoman courts applying Islamic law, but tribal customary law ('urf) governed most disputes. Tribal sheikhs held real authority over their communities. Ottoman officials negotiated with sheikhs, recognizing that direct Ottoman control was impossible over mobile populations in harsh terrain.

The Ottoman government's main concerns were:

1. Collecting whatever taxes it could
2. Maintaining the Hajj pilgrimage route from Damascus to Mecca (the critical annual journey for Muslims)
3. Preventing tribal warfare from disrupting settled agriculture or trade
4. Conscripting soldiers when needed (though Bedouin tribes often resisted or evaded conscription)

For most inhabitants, Ottoman rule meant distant authority that occasionally demanded taxes or conscripts but otherwise left communities to govern themselves through traditional structures.

Land and Livelihood: Subsistence at the Margins

The economy was overwhelmingly agricultural and pastoral at subsistence level:

Settled agriculture in the northwest highlands (Irbid, Ajloun) and around towns (Salt, Karak, Madaba). Farmers grew wheat, barley, vegetables, olives. Landholding was mostly small-scale family farms on miri land (state-owned with usufruct rights) or communal musha'a land

(village-owned, periodically redistributed among families). Some larger estates (iqta') existed, held by urban notables or tribal sheikhs who had secured Ottoman recognition of ownership.

Bedouin pastoralism dominated the desert regions. Tribes moved seasonally with their herds (sheep, goats, camels) seeking pasture and water. The major tribes—Bani Sakhr, Bani Hassan, Adwan, Huwaitat, and others—had traditional territories and migration patterns, but these overlapped and conflicts over grazing rights and water were common. Tribal organization was the primary political and social structure. Sheikhs had authority based on lineage, personal qualities, and ability to maintain tribal unity and negotiate with other tribes and Ottoman authorities.

Small-scale trade connected this region to the larger economy. Grain from the northwest was sold in Damascus and Jerusalem. Bedouin sold livestock and animal products. Merchants in towns like Salt facilitated this trade and imported goods unavailable locally. But this was not a wealthy commercial economy. Trade volumes were small. Most families produced mainly for their own consumption.

The Hejaz Railway, completed in 1908, ran from Damascus through Amman to Medina, was the major modern infrastructure. Built to facilitate the Hajj pilgrimage and strengthen Ottoman control, it connected the region to Damascus and the wider empire. The railway brought some economic activity—stations became small commercial centers—but also increased Ottoman military reach into previously isolated areas.

Population: Small, Diverse, Predominantly Arab and Muslim

Estimates of the pre-WWI population in what would become Transjordan vary, but approximately 300,000-350,000 people lived in this territory:

- **Bedouin tribes:** Perhaps 150,000-200,000, mobile pastoralists
- **Settled agriculturalists:** 100,000-120,000 in towns and villages
- **Town dwellers:** 30,000-50,000 in the few urban centers

Ethnic and religious composition:

- **Arabs:** 95%+ of the population, both Bedouin and settled
- **Circassians:** A few thousand, settled by Ottomans in the 1870s-1880s after fleeing Russian conquest of the Caucasus; established villages near Amman and Jerash
- **Chechens:** Similar numbers, also Caucasus refugees
- **Armenians:** Small numbers

Religious composition:

- **Sunni Muslims:** ~90-92% of the population
- **Christians:** ~8-10% (Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Latin Catholic), concentrated in towns like Salt, Madaba, Karak
- **Small numbers of Druze** in the north

This was religiously diverse but dominated by Sunni Islam. Tribal and local identities were stronger than religious identities. Christians and Muslims in towns lived in proximity with generally peaceful relations, though tensions existed and occasionally erupted. Bedouin society was almost entirely Muslim, organized by tribe rather than religious sect.

What Daily Life Was Like: Hard but Autonomous

For a farming family in the highlands near Salt:

Livelihood: Cultivating small plots growing wheat and barley, some vegetables and fruit trees. The land was worked with traditional tools—wooden plows pulled by oxen or mules. Harvests were uncertain—good rain years produced surplus for sale; drought years meant hunger. Extended families worked together, sharing labor and resources.

Shelter: Stone houses in villages, simple but durable. Multiple generations often lived together or in adjoining structures. Villages were tightly knit communities where everyone knew everyone, marriages were often within the village or nearby villages, and social bonds were strong.

Authority: The village mukhtar (headman) represented the community to Ottoman authorities and mediated internal disputes. More serious matters went to Ottoman qaimmaqam (district governor) or qadi (Islamic judge) in the nearest town. But most issues were resolved locally through customary law and community pressure.

Taxes: Paid in kind (portion of harvest) or cash when available. Tax burden was moderate by Ottoman standards but still resented. Tax collectors were corrupt—they often demanded more than official rates. Families paid what they had to and evaded when possible.

Conscription: Feared. Ottoman army service could last years, and many conscripts never returned (killed in distant wars or died of disease). Families with means sometimes paid bribes to exempt their sons. Others fled to avoid conscription.

Security: Bandits and raiding Bedouin tribes were threats to settled farmers. Villages maintained relations with nearby Bedouin tribes—paying khuwwa (protection money) to ensure the tribe wouldn't raid them, and hoping the tribe would protect them from other raiders. This was tribute by another name, but it kept relative peace.

For a Bedouin family of the Bani Sakhr tribe:

Livelihood: Herding sheep and goats, some camels for wealthier families. Moving seasonally between summer pastures in the northern regions and winter pastures in the desert. Living in black goat-hair tents that could be quickly assembled and disassembled for migration.

Organization: Extended family (bayt) within the larger clan (hamula) within the tribe ('ashira). The tribal sheikh had authority over the whole tribe, clan elders over clans, family patriarchs

over families. Decisions were made through consultation (majlis), with deference to those with status and experience.

Economy: Mostly subsistence—the herds provided milk, meat, wool. Surplus animals were sold for grain, coffee, sugar, tea, weapons, cloth. Some tribes supplemented herding with raiding—either other tribes or settled farmers. This was partly economic (taking livestock and goods) and partly about honor and establishing dominance.

Relations with Ottomans: Minimal direct contact. The sheikh negotiated with Ottoman authorities when necessary, accepting nominal Ottoman sovereignty in exchange for being left alone. Tribes resisted conscription and taxation, sometimes violently. Ottoman forces occasionally launched punitive expeditions against recalcitrant tribes, but controlling mobile populations in desert terrain was nearly impossible.

Justice: Tribal customary law governed. Blood feuds between families or clans could last generations. Mediators (usually respected elders or sheikhs) negotiated settlements—diya (blood money) paid to victim's family, marriages arranged to unite feuding groups, oaths taken to end hostilities. This system worked because tribal members lived together and community pressure enforced agreements.

Values: Hospitality was sacred—guests were protected and fed regardless of cost. Honor (sharaf) was paramount—insults demanded response, cowardice brought shame. Tribal solidarity was absolute—"I against my brother; I and my brother against my cousin; I and my cousin against the stranger."

The Pattern: Marginal Territory, Local Authority, Subsistence Economy

What would become Jordan was marginal to the Ottoman Empire economically, politically, and strategically. It had no great cities, no significant industry, no valuable resources (oil would not be discovered; agricultural potential was limited by water scarcity). Its population was small, dispersed, and organized tribally rather than through centralized state structures.

Ottoman rule was theoretical in much of this territory. Real power lay with tribal sheikhs and local notables who negotiated with distant Ottoman authorities. Average people—farmers, herders, craftsmen—survived through subsistence agriculture and pastoralism, paying taxes when they couldn't avoid it, evading conscription when possible, and organizing their lives through tribal, family, and religious community structures rather than through state institutions.

This was not prosperity. Life was hard, uncertain, vulnerable to drought and violence. But it had autonomy—communities governed themselves according to their own customs and traditions. The state was distant, often irrelevant to daily life. People were poor but they survived in patterns established over centuries.

World War I would destroy this world. What replaced it would be something entirely new—a state imposed from outside, ruled by an outsider, dependent on foreign power, and organized

according to principles alien to the people who lived here. But it would survive. Understanding how requires understanding what came next.

WWI: Destruction, Promises, and the Arab Revolt (1914-1918)

The War Comes to the Ottoman Periphery

When war erupted in August 1914, the territory east of the Jordan River was far from the main theaters of combat. The great battles—Gallipoli, the Caucasus, Mesopotamia—occurred elsewhere. But the war's effects reached even this marginal region through conscription, requisitions, and economic disruption.

Conscription intensified. The Ottoman military needed men desperately. Conscription officers swept through towns and villages, taking young men for military service. Families that had previously evaded conscription through bribes or flight found escape harder as the war's demands grew. Thousands of men from this region were conscripted into Ottoman units fighting in the Caucasus, Mesopotamia, Gallipoli, and other fronts. Many died far from home. Their families often never learned their fates.

Food requisitioning created hardship. Ottoman military authorities seized grain stores, livestock, and other supplies to feed armies. Farmers who had grown wheat for their families' consumption watched soldiers take it. They were given promissory notes for future payment—paper that often proved worthless. The requisitions, combined with the loss of adult male labor to conscription, reduced agricultural production. By 1916-1917, food scarcity was severe throughout the region.

The Hejaz Railway became a military target. When the Arab Revolt began (June 1916), the railway—previously the symbol of Ottoman modernization and the pilgrimage route—became a strategic target. Arab forces, advised by British officers including T.E. Lawrence, repeatedly attacked the railway, destroying tracks, bridges, and stations. Ottoman garrisons along the line were besieged. The railway ceased functioning as economic infrastructure and became contested military terrain.

Economic collapse followed. Trade routes disrupted. Markets closed. The coins that had circulated—Ottoman currency—inflated wildly as the empire printed money to finance the war. Families that had savings in Ottoman currency watched their value evaporate. Those dependent on markets for goods found nothing to buy even when they had money.

The population that would become Jordan experienced World War I not as grand battles but as slow strangulation—young men taken away, food requisitioned, economy collapsing, security deteriorating as Ottoman authority weakened and banditry increased.

The McMahon-Hussein Correspondence: Promises of Independence

While Ottoman authority was weakening, British officials in Cairo were making promises to Sharif Hussein ibn Ali of Mecca, the Hashemite guardian of Islam's holy cities. Hussein controlled the Hejaz (western Arabian Peninsula) and had influence throughout the Arab provinces. The British wanted him to rebel against the Ottomans, opening a front that would tie down Ottoman forces and disrupt their control of Arabia.

In a series of letters exchanged between July 1915 and January 1916 (the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence), British High Commissioner Henry McMahon made extraordinary promises. In the critical letter of October 24, 1915, McMahon wrote to Hussein:

"The districts of Mersin and Alexandretta, and portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo, cannot be said to be purely Arab, and must on that account be excepted from the proposed delimitation. Subject to that modification, and without prejudice to the treaties concluded between us and certain Arab Chiefs, we accept that delimitation. As for the regions lying within the proposed frontiers, in which Great Britain is free to act without detriment to interests of her ally France, I am authorized to give you the following pledge on behalf of the Government of Great Britain, and to reply as follows to your note: That subject to the modifications stated above, Great Britain is prepared to recognize and uphold the independence of the Arabs in all the regions lying within the frontiers proposed by the Sharif of Mecca."

Hussein interpreted this as British commitment to Arab independence across the Levant and Arabia (excepting only the Mediterranean coast). The British were deliberately ambiguous—the phrase "regions lying within the frontiers proposed by the Sharif" could be interpreted broadly or narrowly depending on what suited British interests later. But Hussein understood it as promise of a vast Arab kingdom under Hashemite rule after Ottoman defeat.

On this understanding, Hussein launched the Arab Revolt on June 5, 1916. Hashemite forces, including Hussein's sons Faisal and Abdullah, led Arab tribes in rebellion against Ottoman rule. The revolt began in Hejaz, capturing Mecca, then spread north along the Hejaz Railway. Arab forces, supported by British gold, weapons, and advisors (notably T.E. Lawrence—"Lawrence of Arabia"), harassed Ottoman supply lines, captured towns, and gradually pushed north toward Damascus.

For the Bedouin tribes that would become Jordan's population, the Arab Revolt was opportunity and risk. Some tribes joined, motivated by Hashemite prestige (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad), British gold and weapons, and hope for Arab independence. Others remained neutral or even supported the Ottomans, either from loyalty to the Sultan-Caliph or calculation that the Ottomans might win. Tribal politics were complex—alliances shifted based on immediate advantage rather than nationalist ideology.

The key point: By 1916, Arab populations had been promised independence by the British. The Hashemites were fighting for this independence alongside British forces. The understanding was that after Ottoman defeat, Arab territories would be self-governing under Arab leadership. This promise was central to Hashemite legitimacy and Arab participation in the revolt.

It was a lie.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement: Imperial Division While Promising Freedom

On May 16, 1916—just 11 days after Hussein launched the Arab Revolt based on British promises of Arab independence—British diplomat Mark Sykes and French diplomat François Georges-Picot signed a secret agreement dividing Ottoman Arab territories between Britain and France.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement assigned:

- **France:** Direct control (Blue Zone) over coastal Syria and Lebanon; indirect control (Zone A) over interior Syria including Damascus, Homs, Hama, Aleppo
- **Britain:** Direct control (Red Zone) over southern Iraq; indirect control (Zone B) over northern Iraq and the territory that would become Transjordan
- **Palestine:** International administration (due to religious significance to Christians, Muslims, Jews)
- **Hejaz:** Independent Arab state (Britain recognized this couldn't be controlled directly)

This was direct contradiction of promises to Hussein. Where Britain had promised Arab independence, Sykes-Picot planned European control—either direct colonial rule or indirect control through compliant Arab rulers. The agreement was secret; Hussein and Arab forces fighting the Ottomans weren't told that the independence they were fighting for had already been divided between European powers in a London conference room.

When the Bolsheviks took power in Russia (November 1917), they published secret treaties found in Tsarist archives. Sykes-Picot became public. Arab leaders realized they had been betrayed. But by then, the military situation was irreversible. Arab forces depended on British support to continue fighting. The Ottomans were collapsing. The question was not whether Arabs would get independence, but what terms Britain and France would impose.

Entering Damascus and the Dream's End: September 1918

In September-October 1918, Arab and British forces captured Damascus, Beirut, and Aleppo. The Ottoman Empire signed the Armistice of Mudros (October 30, 1918), ending its participation in WWI. Arab forces under Faisal entered Damascus on October 1, 1918, welcomed as liberators. Faisal established an Arab government in Damascus, claiming authority over Syria.

For a brief moment, Arab independence seemed possible. Faisal ruled in Damascus. His brother Abdullah was in Amman, ostensibly governing Transjordan. Hussein controlled Hejaz from Mecca. The Hashemites believed they had earned their kingdom through the Arab Revolt's sacrifices.

The reality was different. British forces occupied Palestine and Iraq. French forces were preparing to occupy Syria. The Paris Peace Conference (1919) would decide the Middle East's fate, not Arab leaders. President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and the principle of

self-determination raised Arab hopes—perhaps the great powers would honor their promises after all.

They would not.

At the San Remo Conference (April 1920), the League of Nations awarded mandates:

- **France:** Syria and Lebanon
- **Britain:** Iraq and Palestine (including Transjordan initially)

These were not colonies in name—League of Nations Covenant Article 22 described mandates as "a sacred trust of civilization" for peoples "not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world." The mandatory powers would "render administrative advice and assistance" until these peoples could govern themselves. This was the rhetoric.

The reality: colonial control by another name. The mandate system allowed Britain and France to rule territories they wanted while claiming humanitarian purpose.

The French Expulsion of Faisal and the Death of Arab Independence

On July 24, 1920, French General Henri Gouraud issued an ultimatum to Faisal in Damascus: Accept French mandate authority or face military action. Faisal's forces were weak, poorly equipped, and couldn't resist French military power. But Syrian nationalists refused to surrender. On July 24, 1920, at the Battle of Maysalun, Syrian forces attempted to defend Damascus.

The battle lasted a few hours. French artillery and aircraft destroyed the Syrian army. Syrian Defense Minister Youssef al-Azma died fighting. Approximately 400 Syrians were killed, 140 French. French forces entered Damascus on July 25, 1920. Faisal was given 48 hours to leave Syria. He fled to Palestine, then to Britain.

The Arab Kingdom of Syria—which had lasted less than two years—was over. Arab independence, promised by the British and fought for by the Hashemites, was dead.

But the British had a problem. They had used the Hashemites to fight the Ottomans. They had made promises. Faisal and his brother Abdullah were now displaced, angry, and potentially troublesome. Faisal was particularly problematic—he had governed Syria, commanded Arab forces, had international profile from Paris Peace Conference. Abdullah was threatening to march north from Hejaz to attack the French in Syria, avenging his brother.

The British needed to placate the Hashemites without giving them real power. The solution was creating kingdoms—artificial, dependent states where Hashemite princes could rule under British supervision. Faisal would get Iraq (where Britain needed a ruler after the costly 1920 revolt). Abdullah would get Transjordan—a territory that had not been planned as a separate entity but which British officials decided to create as a buffer zone and consolation prize.

Transjordan would be invented not because anyone asked for it, not because the people living there wanted a separate state, but because the British needed to solve a problem created by their own broken promises.

Creating Transjordan: A State Nobody Wanted (1920-1925)

The Invention of Transjordan

In November 1920, Abdullah arrived in Ma'an (southern Transjordan) with a few hundred armed followers. His stated intention: march north, attack the French in Syria, restore his brother Faisal's kingdom. The British couldn't allow this—it would disrupt their arrangement with France. But they also couldn't simply expel Abdullah without humiliating the Hashemites and potentially provoking Hussein, who still controlled Hejaz.

Winston Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, met with Abdullah in Jerusalem (March 1921) at the Cairo Conference. Churchill offered a deal: Abdullah would stay in Transjordan as Emir under British supervision. He would receive a British subsidy to maintain his administration. He would abandon plans to attack Syria. In exchange, Britain would support his rule in this newly-created territory.

Abdullah accepted. What choice did he have? The Hashemite dream of ruling Damascus was dead—the French wouldn't allow it. At least this was something. He would be emir of a territory with a pretentious name (Transjordan—literally "across the Jordan"), ruling with British money, over a population that had never asked for him. It was a humiliating comedown from the dream of an Arab kingdom stretching from Arabia to Iraq. But it was better than nothing.

The British reasoning was explicitly cynical. As one British official put it, Transjordan would be "a cheap solution" to the Hashemite problem. Britain would pay a subsidy (initially £180,000 annually—about $900,000, roughly $15 million in 2025 dollars) to support Abdullah's administration. This was far cheaper than directly administering the territory. Abdullah would keep order, prevent raids into Palestine, and serve British interests. If he proved difficult, the subsidy could be withdrawn and he would collapse.

What was invented in 1920-1921 was not a country but a client state. Transjordan's borders were drawn by British officials in Cairo and London, not through consultation with people living there. The border with Iraq was arbitrary—a straight line through desert. The border with Saudi Arabia was contested (and would be revised multiple times over decades). The border with Palestine was the Jordan River—convenient geographic feature but dividing communities that had previously been integrated economically and socially.

The population—perhaps 230,000-250,000 in the early 1920s (reduced from 300,000-350,000 pre-war due to death, displacement, and emigration)—had not asked for independence from

Syria. They had not requested a Hashemite emir. They were simply told that they now lived in a new entity called Transjordan, ruled by Abdullah, supervised by Britain.

What Abdullah Inherited: Nothing

When Abdullah arrived, Transjordan had:

No administrative infrastructure. The Ottoman administration had collapsed during WWI. No functioning government existed. Salt, the largest town (perhaps 10,000 people), had local notables who provided minimal governance. Other towns had similar informal arrangements. The countryside was tribal territories where sheikhs held authority.

No revenue. The population was overwhelmingly poor, mostly engaged in subsistence agriculture or pastoralism. There was nothing to tax that would generate significant revenue. Trade had collapsed during the war. The Hejaz Railway was damaged and not functioning. Agriculture was disrupted by years of requisitions and conscription.

No military. Abdullah arrived with a small personal force—a few hundred armed men, mostly from Hejaz. This was insufficient to control territory the size of Portugal (originally 91,000 km²—later reduced when southern regions were transferred to Saudi control). Local tribes had their own armed men, often better equipped and more numerous than Abdullah's.

No economy. GDP estimates for early 1920s Transjordan don't exist because there was no functioning economy to measure. People produced for subsistence. Some trade existed—grain from the northwest sold in Palestine, livestock sold in markets—but this generated minimal economic activity. There was no industry. No mining. No oil (and wouldn't be discovered despite decades of exploration). Just subsistence agriculture and pastoralism on marginal land.

No legitimacy among the local population. Bedouin tribes had their own sheikhs. Town notables had their own authority structures. Abdullah was an outsider—from Hejaz, imposed by the British, funded by British subsidies. His claim to legitimacy rested on:

1. Hashemite descent from Prophet Muhammad (this mattered to some)
2. His father Hussein's status as Sharif of Mecca (respect in Arabian Peninsula, less in Levant)
3. British backing (this created as much resentment as legitimacy)

Why would local tribes and towns accept his rule? They had no historical connection to the Hashemites. They had been Ottoman subjects, now they were told they were Transjordanian subjects. Many simply ignored the new emirate and continued governing themselves as before.

Building Something from Nothing: The British-Funded Emirate

Abdullah faced a fundamental problem: He needed to create a state apparatus (government ministries, police, military, courts, tax collection) but had no money to pay for it. The solution was the British subsidy.

The British government agreed to pay approximately £180,000 annually (later increased to £250,000 by the late 1920s) to fund the Transjordan administration. This subsidy covered:

- Salaries for Arab Legion (military force)
- Salaries for gendarmerie (police)
- Salaries for government officials (ministers, bureaucrats, judges)
- Basic infrastructure (some roads, telegraph lines)
- Abdullah's household expenses

Critically, British officials controlled the purse strings and oversaw administration. A British Resident was stationed in Amman to "advise" Abdullah—but this advice was effectively mandatory. British officers commanded the Arab Legion (initially Captain Frederick Peake, later John Bagot Glubb—"Glubb Pasha"). British administrators helped organize government ministries. Abdullah had the title of Emir and ceremonial authority, but British officials made the substantive decisions.

This was indirect rule in its purest form. Britain didn't need to colonize Transjordan directly—they installed a compliant ruler, funded his government, staffed his military with British officers, and controlled policy through financial leverage. Abdullah could rule as long as he served British interests. If he didn't, the subsidy would be withdrawn and he would collapse.

Creating the Arab Legion: A Tribal Military Force

The Arab Legion, founded in 1923 under British officer Frederick Peake, became the backbone of Hashemite rule. It was recruited primarily from Bedouin tribes—particularly tribes that had fought with the Hashemites during the Arab Revolt. These tribesmen were paid regular salaries (funded by British subsidy), given weapons and training, and organized into military units.

Why Bedouin? British and Hashemite reasoning converged:

- Bedouin warriors had military traditions (tribal raiding, fighting)
- Bedouin tribes were mobile and knew the desert terrain
- Bedouin had no attachment to Syrian or Palestinian nationalist movements
- Bedouin loyalty could be purchased through salaries and patronage
- Bedouin culture emphasized personal loyalty to leaders, making them reliable

The Arab Legion's initial purpose was maintaining order—suppressing banditry, controlling tribal warfare, enforcing government authority in areas that had previously been autonomous. When tribes refused to pay taxes or recognize Abdullah's authority, the Arab Legion was sent to compel compliance.

Over time, the Arab Legion became more than a military force. It became the instrument binding Bedouin tribes to the Hashemite regime. Thousands of Bedouin men received steady salaries, pensions for veterans, and patronage flowing from military service. Tribal sheikhs who cooperated with the regime saw their sons given officer positions. Tribes that resisted found themselves attacked by other Bedouin in Legion uniform.

By 1930, the Arab Legion had approximately 1,500 men. By 1940, it had grown to 6,000. These were not huge forces, but they were well-trained, well-equipped (by regional standards), and crucially, loyal to the regime that paid them. John Glubb, who commanded the Legion from 1939 to 1956, created a professional force that was arguably the most effective military in the Arab world by the 1940s.

The Legion was paid for entirely by British subsidy. Transjordan's own revenues couldn't have supported even a fraction of this force. But Britain was willing to pay because the Legion served British interests—maintaining order in a buffer zone between British-controlled Palestine and French-controlled Syria, preventing Saudi expansion northward, and providing a loyal force that could be mobilized for British strategic purposes when needed.

What Average People Experienced: Marginal Improvement or New Extraction?

For the Bedouin family near Karak or the farmer near Salt, what did the creation of Transjordan mean?

New taxes. Abdullah's government needed revenue beyond the British subsidy. Taxes were imposed on agriculture, livestock, trade. These taxes were often higher than Ottoman taxes had been, and collection was more systematic. The Arab Legion enforced tax collection—refusing to pay could result in military action.

Conscription pressures. The Arab Legion recruited heavily from tribes, but this was theoretically voluntary (men joined for pay). However, tribes that wanted good relations with the regime were expected to provide recruits. This was patronage, but it also meant young men leaving their families for military service.

Some improvements. The emirate government provided minimal services:

- Basic courts in major towns (Islamic law for Muslims, Christian law for Christians, plus Ottoman-derived civil and criminal law)
- Some primary schools (mostly in towns, funded partially by British subsidy, partially by communities)
- Minimal healthcare (a few doctors in major towns)
- Some infrastructure repairs (roads, telegraph)

But life remained desperately poor. Agriculture was still subsistence. Bedouin still moved seasonally with herds. Most families produced mainly for their own consumption, with little surplus. Drought years meant hunger. There was no industry, no significant wage employment, no economic opportunities beyond traditional agriculture and pastoralism.

Per capita income in 1920s Transjordan was likely $50-100/year (in current dollars, perhaps $800-1,600 in 2025 terms). This was among the lowest in the world. Most people were illiterate (literacy rates perhaps 5-10%). Life expectancy was probably 40-45 years. Infant mortality was high (estimates suggest 150-200 deaths per 1,000 live births—meaning 15-20% of children died in infancy).

The creation of Transjordan changed little for average people. They were still poor, still struggling to survive on marginal land with inadequate water and irregular rainfall. The difference was they now paid taxes to an emir they hadn't chosen, enforced by an army funded by foreign power, in service of strategic interests that had nothing to do with their welfare.

The Southern Border: Losing Territory to Ibn Saud

In 1922-1925, the southern border of Transjordan was contested. The territories around Ma'an and Aqaba were claimed by both Abdullah (as part of Transjordan) and Hussein's Kingdom of Hejaz. Further south and east, Ibn Saud—the Saudi ruler who was conquering the Arabian Peninsula—was pushing northward.

In 1924-1925, Ibn Saud conquered Hejaz, overthrowing Hussein and ending Hashemite rule in Arabia. Hussein fled to Aqaba (then under Abdullah's control), then to exile in Cyprus. The Hashemites had lost their ancestral homeland. Abdullah and his brother Faisal (ruling Iraq) were now completely dependent on British support—they had no independent power base.

The British negotiated borders between Transjordan and the emerging Saudi kingdom. In the Hadda Agreement (1925) and Bahra Agreement (1925), significant territory was transferred from Transjordan to Saudi control. Transjordan's territory was reduced from perhaps 100,000 km² to about 89,000 km². The Jordanian government today claims this was unjust—valuable land was given to the Saudis to appease Ibn Saud and prevent conflict.

For Abdullah, this was humiliation. He had already lost Damascus. His father had lost Mecca. Now territory he claimed was being given to the Saudis. But he had no power to resist. British decided, and Abdullah accepted what he was given.

For the Bedouin tribes in the affected regions, this meant their traditional territories were now divided by an international border. Some tribes found themselves partially in Transjordan, partially in Saudi Arabia. This disrupted traditional migration patterns and created hardship. But nomadic tribes had been dealing with imperial borders drawn through their territories for decades—they adapted by ignoring borders when possible and negotiating with authorities when necessary.

The Baseline for Independence: What Existed in 1925

By 1925, the Emirate of Transjordan was established as a political entity. It would continue under British mandate until independence in 1946. What existed in 1925 that would shape everything that followed?

Political structure:

- Emirate with Abdullah as hereditary ruler
- British Resident "advising" but effectively controlling policy

- Minimal government ministries (interior, finance, justice, education)
- Arab Legion as military force, commanded by British officers
- Tribal sheikhs maintaining authority in their territories but subordinate to central government
- No elected legislature, no democracy, no political parties allowed

Economic reality:

- GDP: Unknown but extremely low, perhaps $10-15 million total (about $250 million in 2025 dollars)
- Per capita income: $50-100/year (perhaps $800-1,600 in 2025 dollars)
- Population: ~250,000-300,000
- British subsidy: £180,000-250,000/year (~$900,000-1,250,000, roughly $15-20 million in 2025 dollars)
- Government revenue from local taxes: perhaps £50,000-80,000/year
- Economic base: Subsistence agriculture and pastoralism
- Exports: Minimal—some grain, livestock
- Imports: Greater than exports, funded by British subsidy and Jordanian earnings in Palestine

Social conditions:

- Life expectancy: ~40-45 years
- Infant mortality: ~150-200 per 1,000 live births
- Literacy: ~5-10%
- Primary school enrollment: Perhaps 10-15% of children (mostly boys, mostly in towns)
- Healthcare: A few doctors in major towns, no hospitals
- Electricity: None outside Amman (limited there)
- Running water: Only in some urban areas
- Most population: Rural, engaged in subsistence agriculture or pastoralism

Ethnic and religious composition:

- Arabs: 95%+ (Bedouin and settled)
- Circassians and Chechens: 2-3%
- Armenians and others: <1%
- Muslims: 90-92% (mostly Sunni, small Druze community)
- Christians: 8-10% (Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Latin Catholic)

Infrastructure:

- Hejaz Railway: Partially functioning but damaged from WWI, not fully repaired
- Roads: Dirt tracks, a few improved roads near major towns
- Telegraph: Lines connecting major towns
- Ports: Aqaba (minimal facilities)
- Airports: None

External dependencies:

- British subsidy funding 60-70% of government budget
- British officers commanding military (Arab Legion)
- British Resident controlling policy
- Economic ties to Palestine (many Transjordanians worked in Palestine, sent remittances)
- No independent foreign policy (Britain controlled external relations)

What was absent:

- No industry
- No discovered natural resources (no oil, no valuable minerals)
- No significant trade economy
- No middle class (tiny elite in towns, masses in poverty)
- No educated population (literacy ~5-10%)
- No democratic institutions
- No independent military
- No economic self-sufficiency

The situation in 1925 was this: Britain had created a client state with artificial borders, installed a Hashemite emir with no local legitimacy, funded a minimal administration through subsidies, and created a military force recruited from Bedouin tribes to maintain order. The territory had no economic base, no resources, no industry, no educated population, and no capacity for self-governance by the standards Britain claimed to be preparing populations for.

Yet Transjordan would survive. It would achieve independence in 1946. It would remain stable through decades when wealthier, more developed neighbors collapsed into violence and chaos. It would absorb massive Palestinian refugee populations in 1948 and 1967 without collapsing. It would maintain Hashemite monarchy through multiple regional wars and internal challenges.

How this happened—how the poorest, most artificial, least viable state in the mandate system became the most stable—is the subject of Parts 2, 3, and 4. But the foundation was established in these early years:

Jordan survived not despite being weak but because it was weak. It had nothing worth fighting over. No oil wealth to create elite competition. No resources to attract imperial attention once British strategic interests shifted. Just poverty, desert, and Bedouin tribes paid to support a monarchy that depended entirely on external subsidies.

Jordan survived not through democracy or popular support but through authoritarian rule backed by external power. The Hashemite monarchy never needed to develop legitimacy among the population because it had British (later American) backing. The Arab Legion never needed to be accountable to citizens because it was paid by foreign subsidies. The elite never needed to compromise with popular demands because they controlled all violence and could repress opposition.

Jordan survived not by transforming its economy but by remaining poor. While Iraq's oil wealth created elite competition leading to coups and violence, Jordan's poverty meant limited stakes in controlling government. While Lebanon's commercial prosperity created complex sectarian competition, Jordan's subsistence economy provided nothing to distribute except small amounts of patronage to tribal sheikhs.

Weakness was strength. Poverty was stability. Dependence was survival.

This is not a story of development, liberation, or popular sovereignty. This is a story of how the most artificial creation of the mandate system—a state nobody asked for, ruling a people who never chose it, funded entirely by foreign subsidy—became the region's most stable polity by staying weak, poor, authoritarian, and dependent.

Part 2 will examine how this weak foundation was consolidated between 1925 and 1946, how World War II affected the region, how Abdullah maneuvered between British interests and Arab nationalism, and how Transjordan achieved nominal independence while remaining completely dependent on external support. The pattern established in these early years—external dependence, tribal-military alliance, authoritarian rule, poverty as stability—would persist through independence and define Jordan to the present day.

END OF PART 1

Part 2: "Consolidation and Nominal Independence (1925-1950)" will continue the analysis, examining: the development of Hashemite-Bedouin alliance; World War II's effects; Abdullah's territorial ambitions; the 1948 war and annexation of West Bank; the assassination of Abdullah; and the foundation of the system that would allow Jordan to remain stable while wealthier neighbors collapsed.

Jordan: Stability Through Poverty - A Mandate Successor State Case Study

Part 2: Consolidation and Nominal Independence (1925-1950)

Building a State on Subsidies: The Mandate Years (1925-1946)

The Hashemite-Bedouin Bargain: Creating Loyalty Through Patronage

By 1925, the basic structure of Transjordan was established—a weak emirate funded by British subsidy, ruled by a Hashemite prince with no local power base, enforced by a military force recruited from Bedouin tribes. The question was whether this artificial construct could be consolidated into something that would survive beyond British occupation.

The answer came through a deliberate strategy: binding Bedouin tribes to the Hashemite monarchy through systematic patronage. This wasn't democratic nation-building. This was purchasing loyalty from those with the capacity for violence, creating a coalition of tribal interests dependent on regime survival.

The Arab Legion was the instrument. By 1930, it had grown to approximately 1,500 men, organized into mobile camel-mounted units (the Desert Patrol) and mechanized infantry units. By 1940, it was 6,000 strong. By 1948, on the eve of the first Arab-Israeli war, it numbered 10,000-12,000 men—the largest, best-trained, and most effective Arab military force in the region.

Who filled its ranks? Overwhelmingly Bedouin tribesmen, particularly from tribes that had strategic importance or had fought with the Hashemites during the Arab Revolt:

Bani Sakhr: One of the largest and most powerful tribes, their territory stretched across central Transjordan. They provided hundreds of Legion recruits. In exchange, their sheikhs received salaries, land grants, and access to government contracts. The tribe's loyalty to the monarchy became fundamental to regime stability.

Huwaitat: Southern tribe controlling the approaches to Aqaba. Their participation in the Arab Revolt under Auda Abu Tayi (famously depicted in "Lawrence of Arabia") gave them prestige. They received disproportionate military positions and government patronage.

Adwan, Bani Hassan, and others: Major tribes each providing contingents to the Legion, each receiving patronage in proportion to their military contribution and strategic location.

The pattern was explicit: tribes that contributed men to the Legion received:

- Salaries for recruits (steady income for families)
- Officer positions for sheikhs' sons (education, status, connections)
- Government contracts for tribal sheikhs (roads, construction, supplies)
- Land grants in newly irrigated areas
- Access to government positions (police, administration, courts)
- Protection from rival tribes (Legion suppressed tribal warfare that threatened regime-supporting tribes)

Tribes that resisted or refused to provide recruits faced:

- Military campaigns to compel submission
- Loss of traditional territories to regime-supporting tribes
- Exclusion from government patronage
- Treatment as security threats

This created a self-reinforcing system. Tribal sheikhs who supported the regime enriched themselves and their followers. Their rivals either submitted or were marginalized. Younger tribal members saw military service as path to education, regular income, and social mobility. The Legion became not just a military force but a patronage network binding Bedouin society to the Hashemite state.

For a Bedouin family in the 1930s, the choice was clear: If your tribe supported the regime, military service meant your son received salary (perhaps 5-8 Jordanian dinars/month—roughly $15-25, approximately $300-500 in 2025 dollars), training, weapons, and possibility of promotion to officer rank. After service, he received pension and veteran's preference for government jobs. The family's sheikh received contracts and government favor. The alternative—maintaining traditional independence—meant poverty, vulnerability to regime-supporting tribes, and marginalization from the only source of regular cash income in the territory.

This was not subtle. British and Hashemite officials explicitly built the system to create loyalty through material interest. As John Bagot Glubb (commander of Arab Legion 1939-1956) later wrote, the Legion's purpose was as much political as military—binding the tribes to the state through "giving them a vested interest in peace and in supporting the Government."

The British Financial Lifeline: Total Dependence by Design

The entire edifice rested on British subsidy. Every year, Britain transferred approximately £180,000-300,000 (varying by year, increasing over time) to fund Transjordan's government. By the 1940s, this had reached £2 million+/year during WWII mobilization.

What did this money pay for?

Arab Legion salaries: 50-60% of the subsidy. The military consumed the majority of government spending. This wasn't inefficiency—it was the deliberate structure. The Legion was the regime's foundation. Everything else was secondary.

Government bureaucracy: 15-20%. Ministers, judges, clerks, teachers, police. The government employed perhaps 3,000-5,000 people by the late 1930s (in a population of 300,000-350,000). These were the tiny educated elite—mostly from urban families in Salt, Amman, Irbid. Government salaries created a small middle class completely dependent on state employment.

Infrastructure: 10-15%. Roads, telegraph lines, some irrigation projects. But infrastructure spending was minimal compared to military. The territory remained underdeveloped by any standard.

Abdullah's household: 5-10%. The Emir's palaces, staff, and expenses. This was patronage to Abdullah himself—keeping him comfortable and compliant.

Education and health: 5-10% combined. Schools educated perhaps 15-20% of children by the late 1930s (mostly boys, mostly in towns). A few clinics existed in major towns. Healthcare was minimal—people relied on traditional medicine, went to Palestine for serious treatment, or died.

The mathematics of dependence were brutal:

Total British subsidy (1930s): ~£250,000/year Total Transjordan domestic revenue: ~£100,000/year (from taxes on agriculture, livestock, trade) Government budget: ~£350,000/year

British funding = 71% of government spending.

Without British subsidy, Transjordan couldn't pay its military, couldn't pay its bureaucracy, couldn't function. The state existed because Britain paid for it. If Britain withdrew funding, the state would collapse immediately.

This wasn't hidden. Everyone knew it. British officials knew it—they designed it this way to maintain control. Abdullah knew it—he had no independent revenue source. The population knew it—they saw British officers commanding the Legion, British advisors in ministries, British money paying government salaries.

Transjordan wasn't developing toward self-sufficiency. It was being maintained as a dependent client state by design.

What Development Occurred: Minimal and Uneven

By 1940, after 20 years of British mandate, what had changed for average people?

Population growth: From ~250,000 (1920) to ~400,000 (1940). This represented natural increase and some immigration (Palestinians from British Mandate Palestine, Syrians from French-controlled Syria, refugees from various regional conflicts).

Urbanization (slight): Amman grew from 2,000-3,000 (1920) to perhaps 30,000-40,000 (1940), becoming the capital. Salt remained around 15,000. Irbid, Karak, and other towns grew modestly. But 75-80% of the population remained rural, engaged in agriculture or pastoralism.

Literacy: Rose from ~5-10% (1920) to ~15-20% (1940). This was progress but meant 80-85% of the population remained illiterate. Schools existed mainly in towns. Rural areas had few schools and attendance was low (children were needed for farm work).

Life expectancy: Perhaps increased from 40-45 to 45-50 years. This was marginal improvement. Infant mortality remained high (~120-150 per 1,000 births). Diseases—malaria, tuberculosis, dysentery—killed thousands annually. Medical care was rudimentary.

Economic conditions: Per capita income perhaps increased from $50-100/year (1920s) to $100-150/year (1940)—approximately $1,600-2,400 in 2025 dollars. This was extreme poverty by any standard. Most families still engaged in subsistence agriculture or pastoralism. Cash income came from selling small surpluses, working in Palestine, or military service.

Infrastructure:

- Roads: Perhaps 500-600 km of improved roads (mostly connecting Amman to major towns and to Palestine border). Most roads remained dirt tracks impassable in rain.
- Electricity: Available only in parts of Amman and one or two other towns. Most population lived without electricity.
- Water: Some towns had piped water systems. Most rural population relied on wells, springs, cisterns—water scarcity was chronic.
- Railways: The Hejaz Railway was partially repaired but never functioned efficiently again. It was militarily vulnerable and economically marginal.

Agriculture:

- Some irrigation projects in Jordan Valley (small-scale, benefiting few hundred families)
- Introduction of improved seed varieties and agricultural techniques (limited adoption)
- Most agriculture remained traditional—rainfall-dependent, low-yield, subsistence-oriented
- Drought years still meant crop failures and hunger

The overall picture in 1940: Transjordan remained desperately poor, underdeveloped, and dependent. Twenty years of British mandate had produced minimal improvement in living standards. The state existed, the military existed, a tiny urban middle class existed—but these were artifacts of British subsidy, not organic development.

Compare to neighbors:

Palestine (British mandate): Significant development—Jewish immigration brought capital, technology, industry. Cities like Tel Aviv grew rapidly. Arab population in Palestine had higher living standards than Transjordanians. But this came with growing conflict over land and political control.

Syria (French mandate): More developed than Transjordan. Cities like Damascus and Aleppo were commercial and cultural centers. But political instability and French military occupation created resentment and periodic rebellions.

Iraq (British mandate/independent 1932): Oil wealth beginning to flow. Baghdad developing. But vast inequality—oil revenues enriched urban elites while rural masses remained impoverished. Political instability through military coups.

Transjordan was the poorest, least developed, most artificial of the mandate territories. But it was also the most stable. There were no significant rebellions, no nationalist movements threatening British control, no internal conflicts. Why? Because there was nothing worth fighting over, and the tribes that could fight were being paid not to.

World War II: Transjordan as British Military Base

When World War II erupted in September 1939, Transjordan became strategically important. Britain needed secure supply routes, military bases, and loyal forces in the Middle East. Transjordan provided all three.

The Arab Legion expanded dramatically. From ~6,000 men (1939) to ~16,000 (1945). Recruitment intensified—more Bedouin tribesmen brought into service, mechanization accelerated, new units created. British subsidy increased correspondingly to pay for this expansion. By 1945, British transfers to Transjordan exceeded £2 million/year (about $8 million, roughly $130 million in 2025 dollars).

Transjordan became a British military logistics hub. British and Commonwealth forces used Transjordan as:

- Supply route from Palestine to Iraq
- Training grounds for desert warfare
- Recruitment pool for Arab soldiers (both Legion and British army units)
- Safe rear area far from combat zones

Abdullah supported Britain completely. He had no choice—his regime depended on British money and protection. But he also calculated that supporting Britain would earn postwar rewards. He committed the Arab Legion to British service:

- 1941: Arab Legion fought in Iraq putting down Rashid Ali coup (pro-Axis Iraqi officers who had seized power)
- 1941: Arab Legion participated in Syria-Lebanon campaign against Vichy French forces

- Throughout the war: Arab Legion maintained security in Transjordan, guarded supply routes, prevented Axis infiltration

For Transjordan's population, the war meant:

Economic boom (relatively). British military spending flooded the territory with cash. Soldiers needed food, supplies, construction labor, services. Farmers sold produce to British forces at inflated prices. Workers found employment building roads, airfields, military facilities. Wartime employment and British spending raised cash incomes significantly.

Migration to Palestine. Thousands of Transjordanians crossed into Palestine for higher-wage work in British military industries and agriculture. Palestine was industrializing to support the war effort. Transjordanians sent remittances home, supplementing family incomes.

Food shortages. British requisitions of grain and livestock created scarcity. Prices rose. Poor families struggled to afford food even as some were earning more cash. Rationing was implemented but often failed.

Conscription pressure. The Legion expanded by recruitment, but pressure on tribes to provide men intensified. Some young men wanted to enlist (salary, adventure, training). Others were pressured by tribal sheikhs who wanted to maintain good relations with the regime.

Political quiescence. Wartime meant security crackdowns. Any dissent could be labeled pro-Axis and suppressed. Newspapers were censored. Political organizing was prohibited. The population was told supporting Britain meant supporting Islam against godless Nazism and defeating the Axis powers. Most complied—not from ideological commitment but because resistance was futile and the regime was backed by overwhelming British military power.

By 1945, Transjordan had benefited materially from WWII. The population had slightly higher cash incomes. Infrastructure had improved (roads built for military purposes). The Arab Legion was a formidable force. But the fundamental structure remained unchanged: total dependence on British subsidy, authoritarian Hashemite rule, tribal-military alliance as regime foundation, no economic self-sufficiency.

The question in 1945 was whether Britain would continue the subsidy or withdraw. And whether Transjordan could survive independence.

The Path to Independence: Negotiated Not Demanded (1945-1946)

Why Britain Granted Independence: Strategic Calculation

In the postwar period, Britain faced financial crisis. The war had bankrupted the empire. Maintaining global military presence was unsustainable. Colonies and mandates were increasingly costly. Indian independence was coming (1947). Palestine was becoming

ungovernable (Jewish-Arab violence, British casualties mounting). Iraq was restive under the 1930 treaty giving Britain military bases. Egypt was demanding British troop withdrawal.

Britain needed to reduce commitments while maintaining strategic interests. Transjordan presented a solution. Britain could grant formal independence while maintaining:

- British officers commanding Arab Legion (ensuring the force remained loyal)
- Treaty guaranteeing British military access (bases, transit rights)
- Financial subsidy continuing (keeping the regime dependent and compliant)
- British control over foreign policy (preventing Transjordan from aligning with rivals)

This was independence in name only—political sovereignty without military, economic, or diplomatic autonomy. But it served British interests. Instead of directly administering a mandate (costly, internationally criticized as colonialism), Britain would have a formally independent ally (cheaper, diplomatically acceptable, serving same strategic purposes).

For Abdullah, independence was opportunity. Nominal sovereignty elevated his status from Emir of a mandate to King of an independent state. It satisfied Arab nationalist sentiment without threatening British interests. And it positioned him for postwar regional politics—particularly his ambition to expand Transjordan into Palestine and potentially Syria.

The Treaty of London: Independence with Strings Attached

On March 22, 1946, Britain and Transjordan signed the Treaty of London. On May 25, 1946, Transjordan became independent. Abdullah proclaimed himself King Abdullah I of the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan (later shortened to Jordan).

What independence granted:

- Formal sovereignty and international recognition
- Abdullah's elevation from Emir to King
- Transjordan's admission to Arab League (March 1945, before formal independence)
- End of British mandate status (though British influence continued)
- Transjordanian flag, anthem, currency, symbols of statehood

What independence preserved:

- British subsidy continuing (now called "aid" instead of "mandate subsidy")
- British officers commanding Arab Legion (John Glubb remained commander until 1956)
- British military bases and transit rights guaranteed by treaty
- British influence over foreign policy through financial leverage
- No change in economic structure or elite composition

The treaty's key provisions:

Article 1: "There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between His Majesty the King of Trans-Jordan and His Majesty the King of Great Britain..."

Article 3: "His Majesty the King of Trans-Jordan undertakes that he will not adopt in relation to foreign countries an attitude which is inconsistent with the alliance, or might jeopardise the good relations of His Majesty the King of Great Britain with foreign countries..."

Translation: Transjordan couldn't have independent foreign policy contradicting British interests.

Article 7: "Should hostilities break out or be in contemplation... each of the High Contracting Parties undertakes... to come immediately to the aid of the other..."

Translation: Transjordan would support Britain militarily when required.

Article 8: "There shall be established... two Royal Air Force stations in Trans-Jordan at Amman and Mafraq..."

Translation: British military bases on Jordanian soil.

The subsidy continued. Britain committed to annual grants (initially £2 million/year, later increased) funding the Arab Legion and government. Without this subsidy, Jordan couldn't pay its military or maintain state functions. The dependency was formalized in treaty provisions and annual negotiations over funding levels.

This was the independence achieved in 1946: Formal sovereignty with complete economic dependence, foreign policy subordination, and military integration with the former colonial power. Jordan was independent the way a subsidiary is independent from its parent corporation—nominally separate but functionally controlled through financial dependence and contractual obligations.

Compare to other mandate successor states' independence:

Syria (1946): French forced to withdraw after nationalist pressure, uprisings, and postwar international pressure. Syria achieved independence through resistance, not negotiation. French left grudgingly, with no treaty preserving their interests. Result: Syria was poor but actually independent. No French military bases. No French-commanded Syrian military. No French subsidy. France's influence ended.

Lebanon (1943): Independence negotiated with Free France during WWII. France maintained some influence through economic ties and Francophile Maronite elite, but no military presence, no treaty guaranteeing French bases, no direct financial dependence.

Iraq (1932/1946): Nominal independence 1932 but British troops remained under treaty. True independence came 1958 through revolution overthrowing pro-British monarchy. The 1932 independence was similar to Transjordan's—formal sovereignty with British military presence and political control.

Transjordan's 1946 independence was negotiated between Abdullah and Britain with minimal input from the population. There was no nationalist movement demanding independence because Abdullah had suppressed political organizing. There were no mass protests or armed resistance forcing British withdrawal. The population learned about independence when it was announced—a treaty signed in London, proclaimed in Amman.

For average Transjordanians, independence changed nothing. They were still poor. They still paid taxes. The Arab Legion still enforced government authority. British officers still commanded the Legion. Life continued as before, except now they were subjects of a kingdom instead of a mandate.

1948: The War That Made Jordan

Palestine Burns, Abdullah Sees Opportunity

In November 1947, the UN voted to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. The Zionist leadership accepted. The Palestinian Arabs rejected (reasonably—they were 67% of the population but would receive 43% of the land in the partition plan). Violence erupted. By May 1948, civil war between Jewish and Palestinian Arab forces was destroying Palestine.

On May 14, 1948, Britain withdrew from Palestine and the mandate ended. That same day, David Ben-Gurion declared Israel's independence. The next day, May 15, 1948, Arab armies invaded—Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon. This was the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, called the Nakba (catastrophe) by Palestinians and the War of Independence by Israelis.

Abdullah's goal was not destroying Israel. He had been in secret negotiations with Zionist leaders (particularly Golda Meir) since 1946. He wanted:

1. Prevent Palestinian Arab state formation (which would threaten his ambition to rule all of historic Palestine)
2. Capture and annex the West Bank (doubling his territory and population)
3. Control Jerusalem's holy sites (enhancing his legitimacy as Hashemite guardian)
4. Expand his kingdom while appearing to support Arab cause

The secret Abdullah-Zionist understanding:

- Abdullah would invade Palestine but avoid attacking Jewish-designated territories under partition
- Israeli forces would not attack Transjordan
- West Bank would go to Abdullah; Jewish state would control areas assigned by partition
- This was collusion disguised as war

The other Arab states—Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon—invaded with genuine intent to prevent Israel's creation. They were uncoordinated, under-equipped, and quickly overwhelmed by Israeli forces that were better armed, better organized, and fighting for survival.

The Arab Legion's Performance: The Only Arab Success

The Arab Legion was the best Arab force in 1948. British-trained, British-officered (though Glubb nominally followed Abdullah's orders), well-equipped, disciplined. Its 10,000-12,000 troops were battle-hardened from WWII and tribal pacification campaigns.

The Legion's campaign:

- **May-July 1948:** Crossed Jordan River, captured West Bank territories including East Jerusalem's Old City (containing holy sites—Western Wall, Dome of the Rock, Church of the Holy Sepulchre)
- **Battle of Latrun:** Legion held Latrun fortress controlling road to Jerusalem, preventing Israeli forces from relieving besieged Jewish Jerusalem. Repeated Israeli attacks failed. Heavy casualties on both sides.
- **Jerusalem fighting:** Intense urban combat. Legion captured Jewish Quarter of Old City after siege. Civilian population (Jewish residents) expelled. But Legion couldn't capture West Jerusalem (New City), which Israeli forces held.
- **General West Bank control:** Legion occupied West Bank cities—Hebron, Bethlehem, Nablus, Ramallah, Jenin. Palestinian Arab populations welcomed them as liberators preventing Jewish conquest.

But the Legion didn't attack Israeli-held territories outside what Abdullah wanted. It didn't push toward Tel Aviv or Haifa. It consolidated control over West Bank and held defensive positions. When fighting ended (1949 armistice agreements), the lines were:

- Israel: 78% of Mandate Palestine (more than 56% assigned by partition)
- Jordan: West Bank including East Jerusalem (22% of Mandate Palestine)
- Egypt: Gaza Strip
- Syria, Lebanon: Negligible territorial gains

The other Arab armies were defeated:

- Egyptian army pushed back to Gaza, suffered heavy losses
- Syrian army barely penetrated beyond Golan
- Iraqi army achieved little
- Lebanese army token presence

The Arab Legion's relative success became propaganda victory for Abdullah. While other Arab armies were humiliated, Jordan captured Jerusalem's holy sites and preserved Arab control over West Bank. Abdullah appeared as the Arab leader who achieved something while others failed.

The Nakba: 750,000 Palestinians and What They Lost

The 1948 war produced catastrophe for Palestinian Arabs. In what Palestinians call the Nakba (catastrophe):

750,000+ Palestinians displaced. Some fled fighting. Some were expelled by Israeli forces. Some left expecting to return after Arab armies won (they were wrong). The result: 2/3 of Palestinian Arab population became refugees.

400+ Palestinian villages destroyed. Israeli forces systematically demolished villages in captured territories to prevent return. Houses bulldozed. Agricultural land confiscated. Communities that had existed for centuries erased.

Massacres and atrocities. Deir Yassin (April 1948): 100+ Palestinian villagers killed by Irgun and Lehi forces. Multiple other massacres documented. These atrocities spread panic, accelerating flight.

Where refugees went:

- ~300,000 to West Bank (now Jordanian-controlled)
- ~200,000 to Gaza Strip (Egyptian-controlled)
- ~100,000 to Lebanon
- ~80,000 to Syria
- ~70,000 to Jordan East Bank
- Total: 750,000+ lost their homes, land, communities

For Jordan, the refugee influx was opportunity and crisis:

Opportunity: Abdullah could portray himself as protector of Palestinians, legitimizing annexation of West Bank. The refugees' presence demonstrated Arab suffering and justified Jordanian control.

Crisis: 300,000-400,000 refugees (West Bank + East Bank combined) more than doubled Jordan's population from ~400,000 to ~800,000-900,000. These refugees were:

- Traumatized by loss of homes and communities
- Angry at Arab leaders (including Abdullah) who failed to prevent Nakba
- Living in camps with minimal services, dependent on UN relief (UNRWA, established 1949)
- Politically mobilized and potentially destabilizing
- Better educated than East Bank Jordanians (Palestinian society had higher literacy, urbanization)
- Economically disrupted (lost their land and property, now impoverished refugees)

**Abdullah needed to:

1. Annex West Bank formally (claim it was Jordanian territory, not separate Palestinian state)
2. Integrate Palestinians into Jordan (grant citizenship, prevent Palestinian nationalism)
3. Control refugees politically (suppress opposition, prevent organizing)
4. Secure international and Arab League acceptance of annexation

West Bank Annexation: Creating Jordan's Fundamental Division

In April 1950, Jordan formally annexed the West Bank. A carefully managed conference in Jericho (December 1948) had already declared unity between West and East Banks. Palestinian notables (many pressured or bribed) supported annexation. Abdullah presented this as Arab unity—Palestinians and Jordanians together opposing Zionism.

The annexation was internationally controversial:

- Arab League rejected it (other Arab states wanted Palestine to remain separate)
- Britain accepted it reluctantly (British interests served by Jordanian stability)
- US accepted it de facto
- Most countries didn't recognize annexation, considering West Bank occupied territory

Abdullah granted citizenship to Palestinians. This was unusual—most Arab states kept Palestinian refugees stateless, confining them to camps. Jordan made them citizens with equal legal rights (in theory). This created:

- Loyalty among some Palestinians (grateful for citizenship, integration)
- Resentment among others (acceptance meant abandoning hope of return to original homes in what became Israel)

But Jordan now had fundamental internal division:

East Bankers (Transjordanians): ~400,000 people

- Bedouin tribes: Backbone of regime, dominated military and security
- Rural farmers: Poor but stable
- Small urban elite: Government officials, merchants
- Loyal to Hashemite monarchy (through patronage or tradition)
- Considered Jordan their country

Palestinians (West Bank + refugees on East Bank): ~500,000-600,000 people

- Urban middle class: Merchants, professionals, teachers—better educated than East Bankers
- Farmers who lost land in Israel: Now refugees or West Bank residents
- Refugees in camps: Living in poverty, dependent on UNRWA
- Politically conscious, many nationalist or leftist
- Ambivalent about Hashemite rule (grateful for citizenship, resentful of Arab failure)

- Considered Jordan temporary solution, wanted return to original homes

The demographics: Palestinians were now 55-60% of Jordan's population. But they had minimal power. The military remained 90%+ East Bank Bedouin. Government was dominated by East Bank families. Economic power was split—Palestinians dominated urban commerce, East Bankers controlled government and land.

This created tension that would explode in 1970 (Black September civil war) but was manageable in the 1950s because:

1. Abdullah repressed Palestinian political organizing
2. Palestinians were economically dependent (refugees needed UNRWA aid; West Bank merchants needed access to Jordanian markets)
3. Arab Legion was loyal to regime and sufficiently strong to suppress dissent
4. External aid (British, later American) funded the expanded state
5. Palestinians had no alternative—return to Israel was impossible, other Arab states offered worse conditions

But the annexation fundamentally changed Jordan. It was no longer a small desert kingdom of Bedouin tribes. It was a state containing:

- Indigenous East Bank population loyal to regime
- West Bank Palestinians with their own political identity and ambivalent toward regime
- Refugee population traumatized and radicalized
- Jerusalem's holy sites (enormous religious and political significance)
- Economically productive West Bank (agriculture, trade) vs. marginal East Bank

Jordan survived this transformation because:

1. Abdullah ruthlessly suppressed opposition
2. The Arab Legion remained loyal
3. British (then American) subsidies increased to support larger population
4. No viable alternative existed for Palestinians (they needed Jordan more than Jordan needed them in immediate term)

Abdullah's Assassination: The Cost of Ambition (1951)

Why Abdullah Was Killed

On July 20, 1951, King Abdullah I walked to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem for Friday prayers. A Palestinian gunman shot him in the head. He died instantly. His grandson Hussein (age 15) was with him—a bullet struck Hussein's chest but was deflected by a medal Abdullah had insisted he wear. Hussein survived. Abdullah did not.

The assassin was a 21-year-old Palestinian tailor named Mustafa Ashu. He was immediately killed by Abdullah's bodyguards. But the assassination was not the act of a lone gunman—it was a conspiracy involving Palestinian nationalists who wanted to eliminate Abdullah for multiple grievances:

Abdullah's secret negotiations with Israel. Palestinians knew he had collaborated with Zionists. He had accepted partition instead of fighting to prevent Israel's creation. He prioritized expanding his kingdom over liberating Palestine.

The annexation of West Bank. Palestinian nationalists wanted an independent Palestinian state, not incorporation into Jordan. Abdullah had absorbed Palestine into his kingdom, preventing Palestinian statehood.

Repression of Palestinian political organizing. Abdullah banned political parties, arrested Palestinian activists, suppressed nationalist organizing. Palestinians who opposed his rule faced imprisonment or exile.

Rumors of renewed negotiations with Israel. In 1949-1951, Abdullah was pursuing secret negotiations with Israeli leaders about permanent peace, territorial adjustments, and normalization. Palestinian nationalists viewed this as ultimate betrayal.

Abdullah's authoritarian rule. He governed as absolute monarch. Parliament was weak, elections were manipulated, dissent was crushed. Many Palestinians resented being ruled by Hashemite autocracy after British mandate.

The assassination was tragedy and warning. Abdullah had created Jordan, expanded it through the West Bank annexation, and maintained stability through authoritarian control and external dependence. But he couldn't eliminate Palestinian nationalism or suppress all opposition. His death demonstrated the price of his deals with Britain and Israel—Palestinian nationalists considered him collaborator and traitor.

What Abdullah Left Behind: A Fragile Kingdom

When Abdullah was assassinated, Jordan's situation was:

Population: ~1.3-1.4 million

- East Bank original population: ~400,000-450,000
- West Bank Palestinians: ~450,000-500,000
- Refugees: ~400,000-450,000 (counted in above totals)

Territory: ~89,000 km² (East Bank) + 5,860 km² (West Bank) = ~95,000 km² total

Economy:

- GDP: ~$200-250 million (rough estimate)

- Per capita GDP: ~$150-180/year (~$1,800-2,200 in 2025 dollars)
- Still desperately poor, agriculture-based, minimal industry
- West Bank more developed than East Bank (urban centers, commercial agriculture)

Government revenues:

- Domestic: ~$15-20 million/year (taxes on agriculture, commerce, some customs duties)
- Foreign aid (British grant): ~$20-25 million/year
- Total: ~$35-45 million budget
- Foreign aid = 50-60% of government budget

Military: Arab Legion: ~20,000-25,000 troops

- Still commanded by Glubb Pasha (British)
- Still recruited overwhelmingly from East Bank Bedouin
- Consuming ~50-60% of government budget
- Combat-effective but small for territory and population

Political structure:

- Constitutional monarchy (1947 constitution) but king held real power
- Parliament elected but elections manipulated
- Political parties banned or restricted
- Press censored
- Security services (mukhabarat) suppressed dissent

External dependencies:

- British subsidy essential for survival
- British officers commanded military
- Arab Legion equipment British-supplied
- No independent foreign policy (constrained by treaty with Britain)
- Economically dependent on trade with Palestine/Israel and Syria

Internal divisions:

- East Bank-Palestinian divide growing
- Bedouin tribes loyal to monarchy through patronage
- Palestinian refugees politically restive but repressed
- West Bank urban elite accepting Jordanian rule pragmatically
- No national identity uniting East Bankers and Palestinians

The succession crisis: Abdullah's son Talal became king but suffered from mental illness (schizophrenia). He was declared unfit after one year (1951-1952) and replaced by his 17-year-old son Hussein. A regent council governed until Hussein reached 18.

Jordan in 1951 was:

- Artificial state created by British imperial design
- Ruled by Hashemite monarchy with no indigenous legitimacy
- Dependent on foreign subsidy for 50-60% of government budget
- Military commanded by British officers, recruited from tribal base
- Population divided between loyal East Bankers and ambivalent Palestinians
- Desperately poor with no natural resources or economic development
- Surrounded by more powerful neighbors (Israel, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt)
- Vulnerable to internal coup, Palestinian uprising, tribal rebellion, or external invasion

By all logic, Jordan should not have survived. It had every vulnerability. It was the mandate system's weakest creation—poverty, dependence, artificiality, internal division, external threats. Every neighboring state that was wealthier, more developed, or more homogeneous eventually descended into dictatorship, civil war, or catastrophic violence. Iraq's oil wealth produced coups and wars. Syria's larger population and economy produced instability and eventually genocidal civil war. Lebanon's commercial prosperity produced civil war and collapse. Palestine became ongoing catastrophe of occupation and dispossession.

Jordan alone survived. It remained poor. It remained authoritarian. It remained dependent. But it survived.

The Pattern Established: How Weakness Became Strength (1920-1951)

Thirty years of Jordanian history (1921-1951) established the pattern that would define the kingdom through the present day:

First: Total external dependence as survival strategy. Jordan never tried to become self-sufficient. Abdullah and his successors recognized the kingdom couldn't survive on domestic revenues. Instead, they cultivated external patrons—first Britain, later the United States—who paid to maintain the regime because it served their strategic interests. Jordan's poverty made it cheap to support. Its strategic location (between Israel, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia) made it valuable to maintain. Its lack of ideology or ambition made it safe to fund. External powers paid to keep Jordan stable because instability would threaten their interests.

Second: Tribal-military alliance as regime foundation. The Hashemite monarchy never built legitimacy through popular sovereignty, democratic governance, or economic development. It built legitimacy through patronage to Bedouin tribes who dominated the military. These tribes had capacity for violence—they could fight. By paying them not to fight (through military salaries, government positions, contracts) and directing their violence toward regime enemies (tribal rebels, Palestinian dissidents, external threats), the monarchy created stable authoritarian rule. Democracy was irrelevant. Popular support was unnecessary. Military loyalty was everything.

Third: Poverty as stability factor. Jordan had no oil, no valuable resources, no economic prizes worth fighting over. Government revenues were minimal. This meant elite competition for control of the state was limited—there wasn't much to steal. Compare to Iraq, where oil revenues made controlling government worth killing for. In Jordan, controlling government meant managing poverty with foreign subsidies. This attracted fewer competitors. Elites who joined the system received patronage, but there wasn't enough wealth to create intense factional competition.

Fourth: Repression preventing political organizing. Jordan never allowed free politics. Political parties were banned or severely restricted. Press was censored. Opposition was arrested. Elections were manipulated. This prevented nationalist movements, leftist organizing, or democratic opposition from threatening the monarchy. When Abdullah annexed the West Bank, he immediately suppressed Palestinian political activity. Authoritarian control wasn't incidental—it was essential to survival.

Fifth: Geographic buffer status as strategic asset. Jordan's location made it valuable to external powers regardless of its poverty. Britain needed Jordan as buffer between Palestine and Iraq, and to prevent Saudi expansion north. The US later needed Jordan as buffer between Israel and hostile Arab states (Syria, Iraq), and as pro-Western ally in Cold War. Jordan's strategic location meant external powers had incentive to keep it stable through subsidy. This wouldn't have worked if Jordan had resources worth taking—external powers would have intervened to control resources. But Jordan's lack of resources meant it was more useful as stable buffer than as conquered territory.

Sixth: Absorption of Palestinians without political rights. The 1950 West Bank annexation doubled Jordan's population and created permanent internal division. But the monarchy managed this through:

- Granting citizenship (integrating Palestinians legally)
- Excluding Palestinians from military and security (keeping violence monopoly in East Bank Bedouin hands)
- Repressing Palestinian nationalism (preventing organized challenge to regime)
- Using Palestinian economic activity (merchants, professionals) to develop economy
- Keeping Palestinians dependent (refugees needed Jordanian citizenship, West Bank merchants needed access to Jordanian markets)

This created two-tier system: East Bank Bedouin controlled state power, Palestinians dominated urban economy but had minimal political influence. It was unjust. It created resentment. But it prevented Palestinian takeover of the state while benefiting from Palestinian economic contributions.

Seventh: Hashemite pragmatism over ideology. The Hashemites never committed to Arab nationalism, pan-Arabism, anti-Zionism, or any ideology that would constrain their flexibility. Abdullah collaborated secretly with Zionists while publicly supporting Arab cause. He annexed Palestinian territory while claiming to support Palestinian rights. He depended on British subsidy

while nominally supporting Arab independence. This cynicism enabled survival—ideology gets you killed when circumstances change, but pragmatism allows adaptation.

What Average People Experienced: Poverty, Stability, and Subordination

For the Bedouin family that opened Part 1—the family herding sheep near Karak—what changed between 1920 and 1951?

Their sheikh received government position and contracts. He was now part of the regime, receiving salary, land grant, access to government services. He sent his sons to military service and government schools. The family's loyalty to the sheikh meant accepting Hashemite rule.

Some family members joined the Arab Legion. Military service provided steady income, training, prestige. Veterans received pensions and preference for government jobs. The family had vested interest in regime stability.

They were no longer autonomous. Ottoman rule had been distant—the family governed itself through tribal custom, moved freely, paid taxes irregularly. Now they were subjects of a state with military force that enforced compliance. Tribal warfare was suppressed. Raiding was illegal. Autonomy was traded for security and patronage.

They remained poor. Salaries from military service and government positions raised cash income, but most of the tribe still herded animals on marginal land. Drought years still meant hunger. Medical care was minimal. Education was limited. Life expectancy remained low.

But they were stable. No Ottoman conscription into distant wars. No catastrophic violence like Syria or Palestine. No economic collapse like Iraq during sanctions. Just poverty, subordination to the regime, and stability purchased through external subsidy.

For a Palestinian refugee family that fled Jaffa in 1948 and ended up in a camp near Amman:

Everything was lost. Home destroyed. Land confiscated by Israel. Savings lost. Family separated. Community destroyed. Arrived in Jordan as refugees with nothing.

UNRWA provided survival. Food rations, tents (later concrete block houses), minimal education, basic healthcare. This was charity, not prosperity. Camps were overcrowded, services inadequate, conditions harsh. But it was survival.

Jordanian citizenship was granted. This was better than Lebanon or Syria where Palestinians remained stateless. Jordanian passports allowed travel and work. Children could attend schools. Families could leave camps if they found employment.

But political organization was forbidden. Palestinian nationalism was suppressed. Expressing support for PLO or opposing Hashemite rule meant arrest. The family could survive in Jordan but not organize politically.

The dream was return. The family hoped to return to Jaffa, reclaim their home and land. This hope was futile—Israel had destroyed Palestinian Jaffa, built Jewish Tel Aviv over it. Return was impossible. But the dream persisted.

They accepted Jordanian rule because alternatives were worse. Other Arab states offered refugee camps without citizenship. Israel was impossible to return to. Jordan offered citizenship, education, possibility of economic advancement. It wasn't justice. But it was the best available option.

For a farmer in the West Bank town of Hebron:

Life continued with new rulers. Ottoman rule → British mandate → Hashemite Jordan. Each transition meant new flags, new officials, new taxes. But farming continued. The family's land wasn't confiscated (West Bank Palestinians largely kept their property unlike those in Israeli-controlled areas). They paid taxes to Jordan instead of Britain.

Annexation into Jordan was pragmatic acceptance. West Bank Palestinians didn't choose to be Jordanian. They would have preferred Palestinian independence. But after the Nakba, Jordanian annexation was better than Israeli conquest (which would have meant dispossession) or international trusteeship (which offered no citizenship or state). They accepted Jordanian rule as least-bad option.

They resented East Bank dominance. West Bankers were better educated, more urbanized, and economically more productive than East Bankers. But East Bankers controlled government and military. This was colonial logic—the militarily stronger but economically weaker group dominated the economically stronger but militarily weaker group.

They maintained distinct identity. West Bankers considered themselves Palestinian, not Jordanian. They maintained connections to the diaspora. They followed Palestinian nationalism from afar. But they didn't openly challenge Hashemite rule because the cost was too high.

They survived. Farming continued. Commerce functioned. Towns grew slowly. Life was hard but stable. No ethnic cleansing like Israel inflicted on Palestinians. No civil war like would later consume Syria. Just authoritarian rule, poverty, and subordination to a monarchy that protected them from worse fates.

The Baseline for the Next 70 Years: Poor, Stable, Dependent

By 1951, when Abdullah was assassinated, the Jordanian system was established:

Authoritarian monarchy ruling through tribal-military alliance, funded by external subsidy, repressing dissent, maintaining order through violence monopoly in loyal tribal hands.

East Bank-Palestinian divide creating permanent tension managed through:

- East Bank domination of security and military
- Palestinian integration into economy and administration
- Repression of Palestinian nationalism
- Mutual dependence (Palestinians needed Jordanian citizenship, Jordan needed Palestinian economic activity)

Extreme poverty with no natural resources, no industry, no economic development beyond subsistence agriculture and small-scale commerce. Per capita income ~$150-180/year (~$1,800-2,200 in 2025 dollars).

Total external dependence with foreign aid funding 50-60% of government budget, military equipped and trained by external powers, economy dependent on trade with neighbors and remittances from diaspora.

Strategic value as buffer between hostile powers (Israel-Arab states, later US-Soviet Cold War), making external powers willing to subsidize regime stability despite Jordan's poverty and authoritarianism.

Demographic imbalance with Palestinians outnumbering East Bankers but excluded from power, creating system similar to colonial arrangements where minority ruled majority through external backing.

This system would survive:

- 1958: Iraqi monarchy overthrown, Jordan remained stable
- 1967: Six-Day War, Israel occupied West Bank, Jordan lost half its territory but regime survived
- 1970: Black September civil war between regime and PLO, regime crushed Palestinians
- 1973: Yom Kippur War, Jordan minimally involved but survived
- 1980s-1990s: Economic crises, IMF austerity, bread riots, but regime survived
- 2011: Arab Spring protests, Jordan made reforms but regime survived
- 2025: Jordan remains poor (GDP per capita ~$4,500) but stable while wealthier neighbors experienced catastrophe

Part 3 will examine how Jordan survived these crises—particularly the critical junctures of the 1967 war (losing West Bank), 1970 Black September (civil war with PLO), and subsequent decades of economic crisis and regional instability. The question: Why did the system established in 1920-1951 prove durable enough to survive challenges that destroyed stronger states?

The answer, as we will see, lies in the pattern already established: weakness as strength, poverty as stability, dependence as survival strategy, and authoritarian control preventing challenges to the system. Jordan survived not by becoming strong but by remaining weak in ways that made it not worth conquering, not worth overthrowing, and essential enough to external powers that they paid to keep it stable.

END OF PART 2

Part 3: "Survival Through Crisis (1951-1990s)" will continue the analysis, examining: Hussein's consolidation of power; the 1967 war and loss of West Bank; Black September civil war and crushing of PLO; economic crises and IMF austerity; the first intifada and severing ties with West Bank; Cold War positioning; and how Jordan maintained stability through decades that destroyed Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon.

Jordan: Stability Through Poverty - A Mandate Successor State Case Study

Part 3: Survival Through Crisis - Hussein's Long Reign (1951-1999)

A Teenage King Inherits a Fragile Kingdom

On August 11, 1952, the Jordanian parliament declared 17-year-old Hussein bin Talal king of a country that had no right to exist. His father Talal, after ruling for barely a year, had been quietly deposed and sent into comfortable exile. The official diagnosis was schizophrenia. The practical reality was that Talal's erratic behavior, his paranoid accusations against British advisors, and his increasingly unstable governance had convinced the Jordanian political establishment that the Hashemite monarchy required a more reliable figure. Hussein, still a teenager, would have to carry the burden his mentally ill father could not.

Hussein had witnessed his grandfather's assassination. He had been there in Jerusalem on July 20, 1951, when Abdullah entered Al-Aqsa Mosque for Friday prayers and a Palestinian gunman shot him in the head. The same attack sent a bullet into Hussein's chest, but Abdullah had insisted the boy wear a medal that day, and that small piece of metal deflected the bullet that would have killed him. Hussein survived physically. The psychological impact of watching his grandfather murdered, of feeling the impact of a bullet meant to kill him too, would shape everything that followed. This was not abstract political education. This was trauma written into a teenager's understanding of what it meant to rule Jordan.

The kingdom Hussein inherited in 1952 was fragile beyond measure. The Palestinian majority, now comprising roughly sixty percent of Jordan's population after the 1948 war and Abdullah's annexation of the West Bank, resented East Bank Bedouin domination of government and military. Tribal sheikhs might challenge a weak young king. Army officers had been exposed during training in Iraq and Egypt to Arab nationalist ideologies that promised revolutionary transformation and explicitly condemned monarchies as reactionary collaborators with imperialism. To the west, Israel posed an existential military threat. To the north, Syria churned through coup after coup as military officers seized power and lost it with bewildering frequency. To the east and south, Saudi Arabia harbored historic resentment of the Hashemites who had lost Mecca to Ibn Saud in 1925. Hussein's cousin Faisal II still ruled Iraq under British protection, but that monarchy rested on equally unstable foundations.

Jordan remained desperately poor. British subsidy kept the state apparatus functioning, but the doubling of population through refugee influx had strained resources far beyond any reasonable capacity. Across the region, Arab nationalism surged under Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose

radio broadcasts reached millions of Arabs in their homes. Nasser's message was simple and powerful: the Arab nation had been humiliated by imperialism, carved into artificial states serving Western interests, and kept weak by reactionary monarchies. Liberation required overthrowing these puppet kings, unifying the Arab world, and confronting imperialism and Zionism with collective Arab strength. Hussein's kingdom represented everything Nasser promised to destroy.

By any reasonable analysis, Hussein's reign should have been measured in months, not decades. Between 1952 and 1967, he would survive multiple assassination attempts, military coup attempts, regional wars that threatened to dismember his kingdom, and internal rebellions that could have toppled the monarchy. He survived through a combination of absolute ruthlessness toward enemies, shrewd cultivation of external support, and the strange advantage of ruling a state so poor and so artificial that it wasn't worth conquering. Jordan had nothing valuable to steal. This poverty, paradoxically, became protective armor.

The First Crisis: Dismissing Glubb Pasha

By 1956, Hussein faced mounting nationalist pressure that threatened to overwhelm the monarchy if not addressed. The humiliation was daily and visible to anyone who paid attention. The Arab Legion, Jordan's only effective institution and the sole guarantor of Hashemite rule, remained commanded by a British officer. John Bagot Glubb, universally known as Glubb Pasha, had led the force since 1939. For seventeen years after nominal independence in 1946, Jordan's military answered to British command. The Legion's officer corps remained substantially British. British advisors occupied key positions throughout the force. British tactical doctrine governed operations. British equipment and training sustained the Legion's effectiveness.

For a supposedly independent country, this arrangement was intolerable to anyone with nationalist sentiments. Jordan's flag flew over government buildings in Amman, but British officers commanded the force that kept that flag flying. The contradiction was obvious. Hussein recognized that unless addressed, this humiliation would fuel nationalist opposition that could unite Palestinians and East Bank Jordanians against the monarchy. Arab nationalist movements throughout the region were explicitly anti-imperialist. They denounced monarchies as British and American puppets. Jordan's continued dependence on British military command provided perfect evidence for these accusations.

On March 1, 1956, Hussein summarily dismissed Glubb and expelled British officers from the Arab Legion. The decision was sudden, executed without warning, and extraordinarily risky. The Legion had been built over three decades by British officers who created its structure, tactics, training, and equipment protocols. Everything about the Legion's effectiveness depended on British expertise accumulated across generations of colonial military experience. Dismissing Glubb risked catastrophic consequences. Britain remained Jordan's financial patron, providing roughly seventy percent of the government budget through annual subsidy. Alienating Britain could mean financial starvation. The military itself might rebel if British officers who had led it for

decades were suddenly expelled. Equipment might fail without British technical expertise. Training might deteriorate. The gamble was existential.

But Hussein calculated correctly because he understood what British officials had not yet accepted. British imperial power in the Middle East was collapsing. The Suez Crisis, which erupted just months later in October and November 1956, would expose this decline for the entire world to witness. Britain, France, and Israel would invade Egypt after Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. They would achieve rapid military victory, capturing the canal and humiliating Egyptian forces. Then they would be forced to withdraw within days under crushing American and Soviet pressure, their invasion condemned internationally, their pretensions to imperial power revealed as hollow theater. British authority in the Middle East, sustained since World War I through military force and political manipulation, evaporated in that moment.

Hussein recognized Britain's weakness before British officials admitted it to themselves. Jordan needed to adapt before being caught on the losing side of history. The kingdom needed to cultivate American support actively to replace British patronage. It needed to develop an indigenous officer corps to replace British command, demonstrating at least nominal independence. Most critically, it needed nationalist credentials to deflect Arab criticism and compete with Nasserist movements for legitimacy among Jordan's population.

The dismissal succeeded because the timing was perfect. Britain continued financial aid, though the amounts decreased gradually over subsequent years as American aid increased correspondingly. The United States, under the Eisenhower administration's emerging Cold War doctrine for the Middle East, consciously stepped into the role Britain was abandoning. American officials calculated that Jordan represented a pro-Western asset in a region trending toward neutralism or Soviet alignment. Better to subsidize Hussein than to allow Jordan to collapse and potentially align with Nasser's Egypt, which was receiving Soviet weapons and support. Arab nationalists across the region interpreted Glubb's dismissal as genuine assertion of independence, temporarily mollifying criticism of the Hashemite monarchy. The Arab Legion, renamed the Jordan Arab Army to emphasize national identity, remained effective under Jordanian command because the fundamental tribal recruitment system and patronage networks were preserved completely intact.

The structure that mattered never changed. External subsidy still funded the military, now American money instead of British money. Bedouin tribes still dominated the officer corps through the same patronage networks Abdullah had created in the 1920s. The monarchy still ruled through tribal-military alliance, purchasing loyalty from those with capacity for violence. Jordanian officers might now command units previously led by British officers, but they commanded the same Bedouin soldiers, implementing the same counter-insurgency tactics, serving the same monarchical system, funded by the same external dependence. Only the patron's nationality changed. American advisors replaced British advisors. American equipment replaced British equipment. But the fundamental dynamic of dependence, authoritarianism, and tribal domination remained absolutely unchanged.

Nasser's Challenge and Hussein's Repression

Gamal Abdel Nasser represented the greatest threat Hussein would face until the PLO challenge of 1970. Nasser's Egypt preached pan-Arab nationalism with revolutionary fervor that threatened every traditional monarchy in the region. His message combined anti-imperialism, Arab unity, social justice, and confrontation with Israel. He called explicitly for overthrowing reactionary monarchies serving Western interests. Jordan, a British creation funded by American subsidy and ruled through tribal patronage, represented everything Nasser promised to destroy.

Nasser's appeal among Arabs reached levels difficult to overstate. His nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 electrified the Arab world. When Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt and Nasser emerged politically victorious despite military defeat, he became a hero to millions. Radio Cairo's broadcasts reached Jordan daily, denouncing Hussein as an imperialist puppet and calling for revolution. Voice of the Arabs, Nasser's propaganda radio program, specifically targeted Jordan's Palestinian majority and nationalist elements within the East Bank population. The broadcasts were sophisticated, emotionally powerful, and devastatingly effective. They portrayed Hussein as traitor to the Arab cause, collaborator with Zionism, and obstacle to Palestinian liberation.

Among Jordanians, particularly Palestinians who comprised sixty percent of the population, Nasserism found fertile ground. Palestinian refugees remembered that Arab armies, including Jordan's, had failed to prevent the Nakba. They blamed Arab disunity and weak leadership. Nasser promised strength through unity. Young Palestinians in refugee camps, educated in UNRWA schools and exposed to nationalist ideas, saw Nasserism as the path to liberating their lost homeland. Urban intellectuals, frustrated by Jordan's poverty and authoritarianism, embraced Nasser's promises of development and social justice. Even some East Bank Jordanians, particularly younger educated urbanites, found Nasserism's modernist vision appealing compared to tribal monarchy.

In 1957, Jordan held elections that Hussein hoped would demonstrate democratic legitimacy while actually managing opposition through controlled process. The results horrified the palace. The National Socialist Party, explicitly pro-Nasser and advocating Arab nationalist policies, won significant parliamentary representation. Sulaiman Nabulsi, the party leader, became prime minister. He immediately began implementing policies designed to reorient Jordan away from Western alignment toward Nasserist Arab nationalism. He advocated terminating the British subsidy and replacing it with financial support from Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. He pushed for Jordan joining the Egypt-Syria union that would soon form the United Arab Republic. He advocated establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Most dangerously from Hussein's perspective, he called for confronting Israel militarily through coordination with other Arab states.

Hussein faced a stark choice. He could accept Nabulsi's government and allow Jordan to drift into Nasser's orbit, potentially losing the monarchy as Nasserist officers executed a coup similar to those occurring throughout the region. Or he could dismiss the democratically elected government and face condemnation as a dictator crushing popular will. There was no middle

path. The Nasserist movement was explicitly revolutionary. It didn't seek to reform monarchy. It sought to abolish monarchy and replace it with military-led republican government.

In April 1957, Hussein chose repression with absolute clarity about the implications. He dismissed Nabulsi's government despite its electoral mandate. He declared martial law across the kingdom. He ordered mass arrests of opposition leaders, nationalist activists, and anyone suspected of Nasserist sympathies. This was a royal coup against the elected parliament, executed through military force. Bedouin army units loyal to Hussein surrounded Amman. Tanks positioned at key intersections sent an unmistakable message about who held power. Officers suspected of Nasserist leanings were purged from the military through forced retirement, arrest, or execution. The mukhabarat, Jordan's sprawling intelligence apparatus, arrested hundreds of activists. Torture was routine. Some prisoners simply disappeared. Opposition newspapers were shut down. Political parties were banned. The brief democratic opening closed completely.

Why did Hussein succeed when monarchs in Iraq and Libya would fail catastrophically within years? The answer reveals Jordan's structural peculiarities. The Bedouin-dominated military remained absolutely loyal because tribal officers understood perfectly that Nasserist revolution would destroy their privileged position. Pan-Arab nationalism promised professional military based on merit and education, not tribal affiliation and royal patronage. It promised redistribution of government positions to qualified technocrats rather than tribal sheikhs. It promised social transformation that would eliminate the tribal hierarchy that gave Bedouin minorities power over Palestinian majorities. Every Bedouin officer whose position, salary, and future prospects depended on tribal patronage calculated correctly that Nasserism meant personal ruin. They defended the monarchy not from ideological commitment to monarchical government but from clear-eyed assessment of material interest.

The United States supported Hussein with money and implicit military backing. The Eisenhower Doctrine, announced in 1957, pledged American support to Middle Eastern countries resisting communism and radical nationalism. Jordan received fifty million dollars in emergency aid in 1957, a massive sum relative to Jordan's tiny economy. Military aid increased. The CIA provided extensive support to Jordan's mukhabarat, training interrogators, sharing intelligence, and helping build surveillance systems to identify and neutralize opposition. The United States calculated, accurately, that Jordan represented a strategic asset worth preserving. A Nasserist Jordan would align with Egypt and the Soviet Union. A Hashemite Jordan would remain pro-Western, providing a friendly buffer between Israel and hostile Arab states, and offering access and influence in a volatile region.

Jordan's poverty paradoxically helped the monarchy survive. Nasserism promised social programs, economic development, and welfare funded by nationalizing industries and redistributing oil wealth. This worked in Egypt, which had Suez Canal revenues, agricultural surpluses, and significant industry to nationalize. It worked in Iraq, which had oil. Jordan had nothing to nationalize except subsistence agriculture and small merchants. Nasserism's economic promises couldn't be fulfilled in Jordan because there was no wealth to redistribute. The Arab Legion's Bedouin soldiers understood this with perfect clarity. Hashemite patronage delivered tangible benefits immediately: salaries that fed families, land grants that provided

security, government positions that offered status and income. Nasserism offered revolutionary rhetoric but no mechanism for delivering comparable benefits in a country with no resources. The tribal soldiers chose money over ideology.

Hussein demonstrated absolute ruthlessness in crushing opposition. He didn't hesitate to use violence. Palestinian activists, leftists, Arab nationalists, and suspected Nasserists were arrested systematically. Torture was standard practice for extracting confessions and information. Some prisoners were executed after summary trials. Others were held indefinitely without charge. The mukhabarat infiltrated opposition movements, creating pervasive climate of suspicion where no one could trust anyone. Opposition leaders who escaped arrest fled to Syria or Egypt. Those who remained faced constant surveillance, periodic detention, and credible fear of assassination.

The 1957 crackdown established Hussein's authoritarian control for the remainder of his reign. Parliament would be occasionally convened and occasionally dissolved based on royal calculation about managing opposition. Elections would be manipulated through gerrymandering rural Bedouin areas to over-represent regime supporters while under-representing urban Palestinian areas. Political parties would remain banned or severely restricted. Press censorship would be absolute. Civil society would be constrained. The mukhabarat would become ever more sophisticated and pervasive. Jordan would have the formal structures of constitutional monarchy but the reality of absolute rule.

The Iraqi Revolution and Jordan's Isolation

On July 14, 1958, Iraqi army officers overthrew the Hashemite monarchy in Baghdad in a coup of shocking brutality. King Faisal II, Hussein's cousin and fellow Hashemite monarch, was murdered along with the crown prince and prime minister. The bodies were mutilated and dragged through Baghdad's streets by mobs celebrating the monarchy's destruction. Nuri al-Said, the longtime prime minister who had maintained Iraq's pro-British orientation for decades, tried to escape disguised as a woman. He was caught, killed, and his body similarly desecrated. The Iraqi Revolution installed Abdul Karim Qasim's military government, which immediately aligned with Arab nationalist currents and adopted hostile stance toward Western interests.

For Hussein, the Iraqi Revolution represented catastrophe on multiple levels. His cousin had been murdered in the most humiliating circumstances possible. The other Hashemite kingdom, which along with Jordan represented the remnants of the Hashemite dream of ruling the Arab world, had been obliterated. Jordan now stood isolated, surrounded by hostile Arab states on all sides. Egypt under Nasser controlled the newly formed United Arab Republic with Syria. Iraq under Qasim aligned with Arab nationalism. Saudi Arabia maintained historic hostility to Hashemites. Israel remained Jordan's enemy despite secret contacts. Arab nationalism appeared unstoppable. Every monarchy in the region faced existential threat. Libya's monarchy would fall in 1969. Egypt's had already fallen in 1952. Iraq's had just fallen. Hussein had every reason to believe Jordan would be next.

Hussein's response revealed both his dependence on Western power and the West's calculation that Jordan was worth protecting. He immediately requested British and American military intervention to prevent Jordan's collapse. British paratroopers landed in Jordan on July 17, 1958, three days after the Iraqi coup. American Marines landed simultaneously in Lebanon, which faced its own crisis as Muslim groups challenged the Maronite-dominated government. The interventions were coordinated, massive, and sent unmistakable message: Western powers would use military force to protect friendly regimes in the Middle East.

The intervention succeeded in preserving Hussein because Jordan's strategic position made the kingdom worth protecting in Western calculations. If Jordan collapsed and was absorbed by Nasserist forces, Israel would be completely surrounded by hostile Arab states. Western access to the Middle East would be severely constrained. The delicate Cold War balance in the region would shift dramatically toward Soviet influence. The United States and Britain needed a stable, pro-Western state positioned between Israel, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. Jordan filled that role. The cost of maintaining Hussein through subsidy and occasional military intervention was vastly lower than the cost of managing the instability that Jordan's collapse would create.

The Arab Legion remained loyal throughout the crisis because no credible alternative existed that served Bedouin tribal interests. Nasserist revolution would destroy tribal patronage. Communist revolution would collectivize tribal lands. Palestinian nationalism would empower the sixty percent Palestinian majority and end East Bank Bedouin dominance. From the perspective of tribal officers whose families had grown wealthy and powerful through military service to the monarchy, defending Hussein was defending their own positions. When Nasser called for revolution, Bedouin officers calculated that revolution meant losing everything. They defended the monarchy not from abstract loyalty but from concrete material interest.

Jordan's poverty worked as protective factor once again. Iraqi revolutionaries could seize oil infrastructure worth billions. Egyptian revolutionaries had seized the Suez Canal and cotton export revenues. Jordan had nothing comparable. Revolutionaries seizing power in Jordan would inherit a desperately poor desert kingdom dependent on external subsidy, containing a restive Palestinian majority, and generating minimal revenue. Revolution would bring responsibility for poverty, not access to wealth. This reduced revolution's appeal to potential plotters who might otherwise calculate that seizing power meant enriching themselves.

Between 1957 and 1958, Hussein consolidated authoritarian control that would characterize his rule for four decades. Parliament was dissolved. Martial law continued. Political parties remained banned. Press censorship intensified. The mukhabarat expanded relentlessly, given sweeping powers to arrest, detain, and interrogate anyone suspected of opposing the monarchy. Opposition leaders were arrested, killed, or forced into exile. Bedouin tribes received increased patronage as reward for loyalty during the crisis. American and British aid increased to roughly fifty to one hundred million dollars annually, approximately thirty to forty percent of Jordan's gross domestic product.

Jordan in 1958 had become a fully consolidated authoritarian monarchy that had survived Arab nationalism's peak through combination of internal repression and external intervention. It was

authoritarian without apology, dependent without shame, and poor without prospect of development. But it was stable. And stability, in a region careening toward revolutionary transformation, had enormous value to external powers willing to pay for it. The pattern was established: when threatened internally, repress opposition ruthlessly. When threatened externally, request Western military intervention. This pattern would repeat throughout Hussein's reign.

The 1967 War: Losing Half the Kingdom

By 1967, Jordan had achieved fragile stability after surviving the Nasserist wave. Hussein had consolidated authoritarian control. The economy remained poor, with per capita gross domestic product around two hundred fifty to three hundred dollars annually, approximately twenty-four hundred to twenty-nine hundred dollars in 2025 purchasing power. Population had grown to approximately 1.9 to two million, including the West Bank. Relations with Israel remained quiet despite public hostility. Secret contacts between Jordanian and Israeli officials continued through various channels. The border experienced minimal violence. Hussein understood that war with Israel would be catastrophic for Jordan. Israel's military superiority was overwhelming. Any war would mean Jordan losing territory.

But in May and June 1967, regional tensions escalated with frightening speed beyond Jordan's control. Egypt's Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, a move Israel had explicitly warned would constitute casus belli. Egyptian forces massed in Sinai. United Nations peacekeepers were expelled at Egyptian request. Egypt and Syria signed mutual defense pact. Arab nationalist rhetoric reached fever pitch. Nasser and Syrian leaders publicly promised to liberate Palestine, destroy Israel, and redeem Arab honor humiliated since 1948.

Hussein faced an impossible choice. If he stayed neutral in the coming war, the Arab world would denounce him as coward and traitor. Jordan's Palestinian majority, comprising sixty percent of the population, would view neutrality as final proof that Hussein served Israeli interests rather than Palestinian liberation. His legitimacy, already fragile among Palestinians, would collapse completely. But if he joined the war, Jordan's weak military would face Israel's vastly superior forces. The West Bank, the economically productive part of Jordan containing East Jerusalem with its holy sites, would be vulnerable to Israeli occupation.

On May 30, 1967, Hussein flew to Cairo and signed mutual defense pact with Egypt, committing Jordan to war. This was political survival calculation rather than military strategy. He couldn't afford to appear pro-Israeli while Egypt and Syria mobilized for war. Appearing to stand aside while Arab armies fought would destroy any remaining legitimacy among Palestinians and Arab nationalists. But Hussein also miscalculated catastrophically. He believed the combined Arab armies could at minimum achieve stalemate with Israel, or that the United States would impose ceasefire before decisive outcome. He also believed privately communicated Israeli assurances that Israel would not attack Jordan if Jordan remained militarily inactive. He was disastrously wrong on all counts.

On June 5, 1967, Israel launched preemptive air strikes against Egyptian airfields at dawn, destroying Egypt's air force on the ground within hours. Israeli air superiority became total before most Egyptian pilots had even reached their aircraft. The war Jordan entered expecting Arab victory revealed itself as Arab catastrophe within hours. When Jordanian artillery began shelling Israeli positions in Jerusalem in response to Egyptian claims of victory, Israel immediately retaliated with full force.

Israeli forces attacked the West Bank from multiple directions simultaneously. Jordanian forces, approximately fifty thousand troops including eleven infantry brigades and two armored brigades, fought with desperate courage but were overwhelmed by Israeli military superiority. In Jerusalem, Israeli forces besieged and captured East Jerusalem including the Old City containing Islam's third holiest site, the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque, and Judaism's holiest site, the Western Wall. Urban combat was intense and brutal. The Jordanian Arab Legion fought skillfully but was outnumbered and outgunned. By June 7, Israeli forces controlled all of Jerusalem for the first time since the city's division in 1948.

Across the West Bank, Israeli forces advanced with devastating efficiency. Nablus, Jenin, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron fell within forty-eight hours. Jordanian units retreated or were destroyed. Hussein ordered withdrawal across the Jordan River on June 7, recognizing that continuing resistance was futile. Jordanian forces abandoned defensive positions and fled eastward. The war was over for Jordan in sixty hours.

Jordanian casualties were severe: approximately six thousand soldiers killed, twelve thousand wounded, and two thousand captured. Civilian deaths numbered in the hundreds to low thousands, though precise figures remain disputed. Most of Jordan's armor and artillery was destroyed or captured. Infrastructure across the West Bank lay in ruins. Roads, bridges, and communication lines were demolished. By June 7, 1967, Israel controlled the entire West Bank.

What Jordan lost in those sixty hours would reshape the kingdom permanently. The West Bank comprised 5,860 square kilometers, the most economically productive part of Jordan. Cities like Nablus and Hebron had been commercial centers. The Jordan Valley produced vegetables and fruits. Tourism, particularly to Jerusalem's religious sites, had generated significant revenue. Water resources from the Jordan River had supported agriculture. All of this disappeared under Israeli occupation. Approximately four hundred thousand to four hundred fifty thousand West Bank Palestinians now lived under Israeli military rule. Another three hundred thousand to three hundred fifty thousand fled across the Jordan River as refugees, joining those who had fled in 1948. These displaced persons became known as "1967 refugees" to distinguish them from "1948 refugees."

The refugee influx created humanitarian catastrophe. By late 1967, Jordan's population structure had transformed fundamentally. The East Bank original population numbered approximately six hundred thousand to seven hundred thousand. The 1948 Palestinian refugees and their descendants numbered five hundred thousand to six hundred thousand. The new 1967 displaced Palestinians added another three hundred thousand to three hundred fifty thousand. Total population reached approximately 1.4 to 1.65 million, of whom eight hundred

thousand to nine hundred fifty thousand were Palestinians, comprising fifty-five to sixty percent of the total.

The refugee camps expanded dramatically. UNRWA, the United Nations agency responsible for Palestinian refugees, provided basic services, but conditions deteriorated rapidly. Overcrowding became severe. Healthcare was minimal. Education was inadequate. Young men in the camps were angry, traumatized by displacement, and increasingly radicalized. The Palestine Liberation Organization, founded in 1964 under Egyptian sponsorship but marginalized until 1967, suddenly became the organizational voice for this radicalized population.

The economic impact devastated Jordan's finances. The kingdom lost West Bank revenues while gaining hundreds of thousands of refugees requiring food, shelter, healthcare, and education. Gross domestic product contracted sharply. Unemployment rose. The government budget deficit exploded. External aid increased dramatically to prevent complete collapse. American aid reached fifty to seventy million dollars annually. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Arab states, agreeing at the Khartoum Summit in August 1967 to support frontline states, provided forty to fifty million dollars annually. UNRWA expanded operations feeding and servicing refugees. Total external aid reached approximately one hundred to one hundred fifty million dollars annually on gross domestic product of four hundred to five hundred million dollars, representing twenty to thirty percent of the economy.

Jordan's dependence on external subsidy reached unprecedented levels. Without foreign aid, the state would collapse immediately. The monarchy survived the catastrophic 1967 defeat not through military strength or economic resilience but because external powers decided Jordan was worth saving. The alternative, Jordan's collapse and potential absorption by radical Arab states or descent into chaos, appeared more costly than continuing subsidy to maintain Hashemite rule.

Most regimes that lose catastrophic wars collapse through revolution or foreign conquest. France's Third Republic collapsed in 1940 after military defeat. Argentina's military junta fell after the Falklands War in 1982. Egypt's monarchy had collapsed in 1952 partly due to humiliation in the 1948 war. Jordan lost the 1967 war disastrously. The military was crushed. Half the territory was occupied. The economy was devastated. Legitimacy was shattered. Yet Hussein remained king. Understanding why reveals Jordan's peculiar structural advantages.

The Arab Legion's core Bedouin units remained loyal despite defeat. Tribal officers and elite soldiers blamed the disaster on Arab disunity and Israeli military superiority, not on the monarchy. Their material interests depended entirely on regime survival. Military salaries, pensions, land grants, government positions, and patronage all flowed from the Hashemite state. Revolution would destroy this system. The officers calculated accurately that no alternative regime would preserve tribal privileges. They defended Hussein not from patriotic fervor but from recognition that monarchy's survival meant their families' prosperity continued.

No viable alternative to Hussein existed that served any significant constituency's interests. Palestinian nationalists wanted PLO leadership, but the PLO didn't control military force capable

of seizing power. Nasserists still existed in Jordan, but Nasser's Egypt had also been catastrophically defeated, shattering Arab nationalism's credibility. Leftists and communists remained small minorities easily suppressed. The Bedouin tribes controlling military force would violently resist any attempted coup by Palestinians or non-tribal forces.

External powers actively wanted Hussein to survive. American and British strategists calculated that destabilizing Jordan would benefit the Soviet Union and radical Arab states. Better to maintain Hussein, weak and dependent but reliably pro-Western, than risk the unknown. Western aid increased dramatically to prevent economic collapse and regime overthrow. Jordan received not just money but political support, diplomatic backing, and implicit security guarantees. The message to potential coup plotters was clear: overthrowing Hussein would bring American and possibly Israeli intervention.

Hussein moved with characteristic ruthlessness to stabilize his rule. He purged military officers suspected of disloyalty or inadequate commitment during the war. The mukhabarat intensified surveillance and made waves of arrests. Martial law continued under emergency powers that suspended normal legal protections. He negotiated increased aid from the United States, Britain, and Arab states. He publicly accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242, which acknowledged Israeli control of occupied territories in exchange for eventual peace, positioning himself as moderate willing to negotiate rather than rejectionist demanding Israel's destruction.

Most importantly, Jordan had nothing left worth conquering. The West Bank was gone. The economic prize had been taken. What remained was East Bank desert, refugee camps filled with angry Palestinians, and impoverished Bedouin communities. No Arab state wanted to annex Jordan and inherit these problems. Israel had taken what it wanted and had no interest in occupying the resource-poor East Bank and absorbing Jordan's population. The kingdom survived partly because what remained wasn't worth the cost of conquest.

Weakness was strength again. Jordan survived catastrophic military defeat because it was too poor, too dependent, and too economically worthless to be worth destroying. External powers calculated that maintaining stability through subsidy was cheaper than managing the chaos that Jordan's collapse would create. The monarchy endured because the Bedouin military base remained loyal and no alternative power center existed capable of seizing control. The 1967 defeat, which should have destroyed the regime, instead revealed the durability of the system Abdullah had created and Hussein had consolidated: authoritarianism, tribal control, external dependence, and poverty combined to produce unexpected resilience.

Black September: The Civil War That Revealed Who Really Ruled Jordan

Between 1967 and 1970, the Palestine Liberation Organization transformed from marginal political organization into dominant Palestinian force with territorial control inside Jordan. After the catastrophic Arab defeat in 1967, Palestinians concluded they couldn't depend on conventional Arab armies to liberate Palestine. Arab states had failed twice, in 1948 and 1967. Palestinian armed struggle would have to liberate Palestine. This conclusion drove thousands of

young Palestinians, particularly refugees living in camps with nothing to lose, into PLO organizations.

Fatah, led by Yasser Arafat, became the PLO's largest faction after the 1967 war. Other groups proliferated: the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine under George Habash, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine under Nayef Hawatmeh, and smaller Marxist and nationalist factions. These organizations recruited heavily from refugee camps, establishing training facilities, importing weapons from Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and the Soviet bloc, and launching raids into Israel from Jordanian territory. The raids were mostly unsuccessful militarily, achieving little beyond demonstrating Palestinian willingness to fight. But symbolically they were immensely important, showing that Palestinians hadn't accepted defeat.

More significantly for Jordan's internal politics, the PLO began providing services in refugee camps that the Jordanian government couldn't or wouldn't provide. PLO organizations ran clinics, schools, youth programs, and welfare services. They established administrative structures parallel to Jordanian government institutions. They created courts settling disputes according to revolutionary principles rather than Jordanian law. They collected "taxes" and "revolutionary fees" from Palestinian businesses and individuals. By 1970, the PLO had effectively created a state within Jordan's state.

The PLO's territorial control expanded systematically. Refugee camps became PLO-administered zones where Jordanian police and military couldn't enter without PLO permission. Sections of Amman, Irbid, and Zarqa came under PLO control, with Palestinian fighters establishing checkpoints and conducting patrols. When Jordanian security forces attempted to assert authority, armed clashes erupted. The PLO made no secret of its growing power. Yasser Arafat famously declared in 1970: "We are the authority here." This wasn't revolutionary rhetoric. This was accurate description of reality in parts of Jordan's capital city.

Hussein tolerated this situation longer than logic suggested he should because suppressing the PLO would require violence that would kill thousands of Palestinians who comprised sixty percent of Jordan's population. Arab states, particularly Egypt and Syria, strongly supported the PLO and would condemn any Jordanian military action as aggression against the Palestinian revolution. The United States, concerned about regional stability, pressured Hussein to avoid confrontation. And Hussein himself recognized that the Bedouin military officers were becoming dangerously restive as they watched Palestinian fighters humiliate the Jordanian government daily. If Hussein didn't act soon, the military might act without him, launching a coup that would sweep away the monarchy along with the PLO.

The provocation that finally triggered confrontation came from the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine's decision to hijack commercial airliners. On September 6 through 9, 1970, PFLP operatives hijacked four aircraft: TWA Flight 741 from Frankfurt, Swissair Flight 100 from Zurich, Pan Am Flight 93 from Amsterdam, and an attempted hijacking of El Al Flight 219. Three of the aircraft were forced to land at Dawson's Field, a remote desert airstrip in Jordan that the PFLP had chosen specifically to demonstrate PLO control over Jordanian territory. The hijackers held

hundreds of passengers hostage, demanding release of Palestinian prisoners held in Israel and European countries.

For Hussein, the hijackings represented intolerable challenge to Jordanian sovereignty. The international media descended on Jordan, filming dramatic footage of hijacked aircraft sitting in the Jordanian desert while armed Palestinian fighters guarded them. The world watched the Jordanian government prove unable to control its own territory or rescue hostages held on Jordanian soil. International outrage focused on Jordan's apparent impotence. Israel threatened military action if Jordan couldn't handle the situation. The United States demanded Jordan take control. The PFLP was openly mocking Jordanian authority, demonstrating that Palestinian revolutionaries, not the Hashemite monarchy, controlled Jordan.

On September 16, 1970, Hussein ordered the Jordanian Arab Army to crush the PLO. What followed was ten days of brutal urban warfare that killed thousands and displaced tens of thousands more. This was civil war, though one side had overwhelming military superiority.

The Jordanian military deployed approximately sixty to seventy thousand troops against PLO forces estimated at fifteen to thirty thousand fighters. But numbers didn't tell the full story. The Jordanian forces included tanks, artillery, and aircraft. The PLO had rifles, machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and nothing that could stop armored vehicles or aircraft. The military imbalance was total. What made the fighting brutal was that it occurred in urban areas where PLO fighters fought from buildings, refugee camps, and residential neighborhoods, and the Jordanian military responded with overwhelming firepower that destroyed civilian infrastructure and killed civilians alongside fighters.

In Amman, tank battles erupted in city streets. Artillery bombarded Palestinian neighborhoods, reducing blocks to rubble. Jordanian forces surrounded PLO strongholds and subjected them to sustained bombardment until resistance collapsed. House-to-house combat continued for days as Jordanian troops cleared buildings systematically. In Irbid and Zarqa, similar patterns played out. Refugee camps came under particularly heavy attack. The Jordanian military treated the camps as military targets, bombarding them with artillery and attacking with armor despite knowing that most residents were civilians.

The casualty figures remain disputed because both sides had strong incentives to manipulate numbers. The PLO claimed ten thousand or more Palestinians killed, seeking to portray the Jordanian action as genocide. Jordan claimed far fewer, perhaps three thousand, seeking to minimize international condemnation. Independent estimates suggest three thousand five hundred to six thousand Palestinians died during the ten days of heaviest fighting in September, with another several thousand dying in subsequent months as Jordanian forces hunted down remaining PLO cells. Jordanian military casualties numbered five hundred to one thousand killed. Total deaths likely exceeded five thousand, possibly reaching six thousand to seven thousand. Wounded numbered in the tens of thousands. Entire neighborhoods in Amman lay destroyed. Refugee camps were devastated.

On September 20, 1970, Syria intervened militarily to support the PLO, sending approximately three hundred tanks across the border into northern Jordan. This represented the most dangerous moment for Hussein. Syrian armor could have tipped the balance, allowing the PLO to survive and potentially overthrowing the monarchy. But the Jordanian air force, equipped with American-supplied F-104 Starfighters and British-supplied Hawker Hunters, attacked the Syrian column relentlessly. Without air cover, Syrian tanks were vulnerable. Jordanian pilots destroyed or damaged over one hundred Syrian tanks in two days of air strikes. Israel mobilized forces on the Syrian border, signaling willingness to intervene directly against Syria if necessary to preserve Jordan's monarchy. The United States moved the Sixth Fleet into position and placed airborne forces on alert. Syria, facing Israeli threat and devastating losses, withdrew its forces on September 22.

By September 25, 1970, the PLO leadership recognized defeat was inevitable and negotiated ceasefire. Arafat agreed to withdraw PLO forces from Jordanian cities and eventually from Jordan entirely. Over the following months, thousands of PLO fighters and their families were expelled to Lebanon, where they would contribute to destabilizing Lebanese politics and ultimately trigger Lebanon's catastrophic 1975-1990 civil war. Through 1971, Jordanian forces continued hunting remaining PLO cells. Refugee camps were searched systematically. Weapons were confiscated. Palestinian activists suspected of PLO sympathies were arrested, tortured for information about remaining cells, and often held indefinitely without charge or killed. By July 1971, the last significant PLO military presence had been eliminated. The organization that had claimed to be the authority in Jordan was destroyed as territorial force.

The suppression succeeded for reasons that reveal Jordan's fundamental power structure. The Bedouin-dominated military remained absolutely loyal throughout the crisis because tribal officers understood perfectly that PLO victory would destroy their privileged position. Everything Bedouin officers possessed—their military ranks, their government salaries, their family wealth accumulated through decades of Hashemite patronage, their political dominance despite being demographic minority—depended on the Hashemite monarchy's survival. A PLO-governed Jordan would create Palestinian-majority government that would dismantle Bedouin tribal privileges, professionalize the military based on merit rather than tribal affiliation, and redistribute government positions and patronage to the Palestinian majority. Bedouin soldiers fought with extreme brutality because they were defending their families' economic and political positions, not abstract principles.

Palestinians themselves were divided in ways the PLO couldn't overcome. Not all Palestinians supported the PLO's maximalist revolutionary program. Urban middle-class Palestinians and established West Bank families often opposed the radicalism that was bringing Israeli retaliation and destabilizing Jordan. They wanted stability, economic opportunity, and gradual improvement, not revolution that would destroy what little they had built. The PLO's base was primarily refugee camps filled with young men with nothing to lose. But refugee camp residents, while numerous, didn't control economic resources or have weapons comparable to the Jordanian military. Their courage couldn't overcome their material weakness.

External support proved decisive. The United States provided intelligence, diplomatic backing, and implicit military guarantee. American signals to Israel indicated support for Israeli intervention if necessary to save Hussein. Israel deterred Syrian intervention by mobilizing forces threateningly. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait provided financial aid to help Jordan recover from the war's economic disruption. Britain offered diplomatic support at the United Nations. Arab states that had rhetorically supported the PLO provided minimal actual support during the fighting. Egypt's Nasser died on September 28, 1970, just days after the ceasefire, removing the PLO's most important Arab patron. Syria had been humiliated militarily and wouldn't risk another intervention. Iraq provided weapons to the PLO but no direct military support.

Most fundamentally, the PLO was militarily inferior in ways courage couldn't overcome. Despite large numbers of fighters, the PLO had light weapons while the Jordanian military had tanks, artillery, and aircraft. Urban warfare favors defenders when they fight guerrilla-style, but the Jordanian military proved willing to destroy entire neighborhoods to eliminate PLO positions. The cost in civilian deaths and infrastructure destruction was enormous, but the Jordanian military accepted these costs. The PLO couldn't match this willingness to inflict mass destruction. Palestinian fighters operated among civilian populations they were trying to protect. Jordanian forces treated Palestinian neighborhoods as enemy territory where civilian casualties were acceptable.

The aftermath consolidated Hashemite control in ways that would shape Jordan for decades. The PLO was expelled to Lebanon, where Arafat would rebuild the organization in exile but never again directly threaten Jordanian sovereignty. Palestinian political organizing inside Jordan was crushed completely. The mukhabarat intensified surveillance of Palestinian communities, infiltrating any group that might organize politically. Refugee camps were occupied by Jordanian military units and placed under permanent surveillance. Palestinians could live, work, and even prosper economically in Jordan, but they couldn't organize politically or challenge Hashemite rule. Palestinian cultural and political expression was systematically suppressed. Speaking openly about Palestinian nationalism or criticizing the monarchy became dangerous. Detention, torture, or worse awaited those who crossed invisible lines the mukhabarat enforced.

Black September established definitively that Jordan would remain Hashemite-ruled and Bedouin-dominated regardless of demographic realities. Palestinians comprised sixty percent of the population but controlled zero percent of military power. They were majority without sovereignty, economically active but politically excluded, present in large numbers but systematically marginalized from state power. This was colonial logic at its purest: a demographically smaller but militarily stronger group dominated a demographically larger but militarily weaker group through monopoly on organized violence backed by external power.

The pattern revealed something profound about Jordan's stability. The kingdom survived not through popular legitimacy or democratic governance but through absolute military dominance by a loyal minority funded by external patrons. Democracy was impossible because it would empower the Palestinian majority to overthrow East Bank Bedouin control. The system required authoritarianism because only authoritarianism prevented the majority from exercising majority

rule. Black September proved this beyond doubt. When the majority attempted to assert power, the minority crushed them with foreign backing. This was the system's essence, stripped of any pretense about preparing peoples for self-government or building democratic institutions.

The Oil Boom Years: Prosperity Through Others' Wealth

The 1973 oil crisis and subsequent oil boom transformed the Middle East's economic landscape but left Jordan in its familiar position of profiting indirectly from others' resources. When Arab oil producers quadrupled oil prices from approximately three dollars per barrel in 1973 to twelve dollars per barrel in 1974, and prices continued rising toward thirty-five dollars per barrel by 1980, oil states collected hundreds of billions in revenues. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, and Libya suddenly had wealth beyond their capacity to absorb domestically. This wealth flowed throughout the region through multiple channels, and Jordan positioned itself to capture what it could.

Jordan had no oil. Decades of exploration had found nothing. The geology was unfavorable. What lay beneath Jordan's desert was phosphate and potash, useful for fertilizer but not comparable to oil in value. But Jordan benefited from the oil boom through two mechanisms that would characterize its economy for decades: remittances from migrant workers and aid from oil-rich Arab states.

The remittances transformed household economics across Jordan. Jordanians, particularly Palestinians from refugee camps and West Bank families that had been incorporated into Jordan, migrated to Gulf states by the hundreds of thousands. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman all needed workers for massive construction projects, expanding oil infrastructure, government bureaucracies, and service sectors. They imported labor rather than developing their own populations, creating economies where citizens held government sinecures and collected oil rents while foreigners did actual work. Jordanians, educated in UNRWA schools and Jordanian universities, with Arabic language skills and professional training, filled positions throughout Gulf economies.

By 1980, approximately three hundred thousand to three hundred fifty thousand Jordanians worked abroad, primarily in Gulf states. This represented roughly twenty to twenty-five percent of Jordan's entire labor force. These workers sent money home to support families, creating remittance flows that grew dramatically through the 1970s. In 1975, remittances totaled approximately two hundred million dollars. By 1980, they reached one point two billion dollars annually. The peak came in 1984 at roughly one point three billion dollars, representing approximately twenty-five to thirty percent of Jordan's gross domestic product.

These remittances supported consumption, funded education, built homes, and stabilized the economy. Families with members working in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia lived comfortably on remittance income. They purchased consumer goods, expanded homes, educated children, and saved for the future. The government benefited through taxation of remittances and customs duties on imports purchased with remittance income. The remittances also had multiplier effects, supporting service sectors catering to families with Gulf income. But the remittances

were fundamentally dependent on factors Jordan didn't control: continued Gulf economic growth, demand for foreign labor, and Gulf states' willingness to employ Jordanians.

Arab aid provided the second channel through which oil wealth reached Jordan. At the 1967 Khartoum Summit, Arab states had agreed to provide financial support to frontline states facing Israel. This commitment was renewed and expanded after the 1973 war. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates collectively provided three hundred to five hundred million dollars annually through the 1970s and early 1980s. This aid funded government operations, military expenditures, and development projects. Combined with continued American aid of one hundred to two hundred million dollars annually, total external aid reached six hundred to eight hundred million dollars per year on gross domestic product of two to three billion dollars, representing twenty to thirty percent of the economy.

The economy grew rapidly during this period, averaging eight to ten percent annual growth through the 1970s. Per capita income rose dramatically from approximately three hundred dollars in 1970 to roughly sixteen hundred dollars by 1980, a fivefold increase in a decade. This growth created visible prosperity. Cities expanded. Amman transformed from modest provincial capital to sprawling urban center with modern infrastructure. The government invested in roads, airports, telecommunications, electricity generation, and water systems. Education expanded dramatically. The University of Jordan, established in 1962, grew substantially. Yarmouk University was founded in 1976. Technical colleges and vocational training expanded. By 1980, literacy rates exceeded seventy-five percent, and primary school enrollment was nearly universal.

Healthcare improved measurably. New hospitals and clinics were built. Medical school graduates increased. Infant mortality declined. Life expectancy rose from approximately fifty-five years in 1970 to sixty-five years by 1980. These were genuine improvements in living standards affecting millions of people. Families that had lived in poverty in the 1950s and 1960s saw their children educated, employed, and living with material comforts that would have seemed impossible a generation earlier.

But the prosperity was artificial, built on foundations Jordan didn't control and couldn't sustain. The economy wasn't growing through increased productive capacity, industrialization, or development of export industries. It was growing through consumption funded by remittances and aid. When oil prices declined, Gulf economies would contract, demand for foreign labor would fall, remittances would decrease, and Arab aid would be reduced. Jordan had no control over any of these factors. The kingdom was prospering through dependence on external conditions that could change suddenly.

The debt accumulation during this period revealed the unsustainability. Jordan borrowed heavily during the boom years, assuming that current growth rates would continue indefinitely. Government spending expanded to provide services and infrastructure that were politically popular but couldn't be sustained through domestic revenues. By 1980, external debt had reached approximately two billion dollars, representing roughly seventy percent of gross

domestic product. This was manageable as long as oil wealth continued flowing and the economy continued growing. When conditions changed, the debt would become crisis.

The Collapse: When External Conditions Turned

The 1980s brought multiple shocks that exposed Jordan's vulnerability. Oil prices peaked at thirty-five dollars per barrel in 1980, then declined steadily through the decade, reaching ten to fifteen dollars per barrel by 1986. Gulf economies, which had grown explosively during the boom, contracted sharply. The Iran-Iraq War, which consumed both countries from 1980 to 1988, disrupted Gulf economies and reduced demand for foreign labor. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states faced budget deficits for the first time in a decade and began reducing foreign worker populations.

The impact on Jordan was immediate and severe. Remittances peaked at one point three billion dollars in 1984, then declined to approximately six hundred to seven hundred million dollars by 1988, a drop of roughly fifty percent in four years. Thousands of Jordanian workers returned home unemployed, requiring government services and competing for limited jobs in Jordan's small economy. The families that had lived comfortably on Gulf remittances suddenly faced drastically reduced incomes.

Arab aid declined correspondingly. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait reduced transfers to Jordan, partly because their own oil revenues had declined, partly because they disapproved of Jordan's neutrality in the Iran-Iraq War. Jordan had maintained relations with both sides, refusing to join Arab states supporting Iraq against Iran. This pragmatism made strategic sense but offended Gulf states that expected solidarity. By the late 1980s, Arab aid had fallen to roughly one hundred to two hundred million dollars annually, a decline of sixty to seventy percent from peak levels.

The government's response was catastrophically inadequate. Spending had expanded during boom years to levels that couldn't be sustained when revenues declined. Civil service employment had grown to approximately eighty thousand by the mid-1980s. Subsidies for bread, fuel, sugar, and other staples had become politically untouchable. Military spending remained high because the monarchy's survival depended on keeping the Bedouin military satisfied. But revenues from taxation and domestic economic activity couldn't support this level of spending. The government continued borrowing to maintain expenditure levels, assuming that conditions would improve.

External debt exploded from two billion dollars in 1980 to five billion dollars by 1985 to eight billion dollars by 1989. By the late 1980s, debt exceeded two hundred percent of gross domestic product. Debt service, the interest payments on outstanding loans, consumed thirty to forty percent of government budget. Jordan was borrowing to pay interest on previous borrowing, the classic debt spiral that precedes sovereign default.

In 1989, Jordan faced imminent default and had no choice but to negotiate with the International Monetary Fund for emergency loans. The IMF imposed standard structural adjustment

conditions: cut government spending, eliminate subsidies, devalue currency, increase taxes, and privatize state enterprises. These policies were economically orthodox but politically explosive in Jordan's context.

The government implemented subsidy cuts in April 1989. Bread prices doubled overnight. Fuel prices increased thirty to fifty percent. Basic commodities that families had relied on at stable prices suddenly became unaffordable. For families already struggling with reduced remittance income and unemployment, this was economic catastrophe. Real incomes fell sharply. Per capita income adjusted for inflation declined from roughly sixteen hundred dollars in 1984 to approximately thirteen hundred dollars by 1992. Unemployment rose from approximately eight percent in 1985 to twenty percent by 1992. Youth unemployment, always higher than general unemployment, reached thirty to forty percent. University graduates couldn't find jobs matching their education. The prosperity of the 1970s evaporated.

On April 18, 1989, protests erupted in Ma'an, Karak, and other southern towns. These were Jordan's Bedouin heartland, the regime's traditional base of support. The protests weren't Palestinian opposition to Hashemite rule. These were East Bank Bedouins, the very population that had kept Hussein in power for thirty-seven years, demonstrating against economic policies that were impoverishing them. Protesters attacked government buildings, burned vehicles, clashed with police, and denounced the IMF austerity measures. This was dangerous in ways that Palestinian protests were not. Palestinian opposition could be suppressed through established mechanisms. Bedouin opposition threatened the regime's foundation.

Hussein responded with characteristic mixture of repression and tactical concession. Security forces suppressed the riots, arresting dozens and killing several protesters in clashes. But Hussein also dismissed the prime minister, promised reforms, partially restored some subsidies, and most significantly, called for parliamentary elections in November 1989. These would be the first relatively free elections since the 1950s, representing Jordan's brief democratic opening.

The 1989 elections produced parliament with genuine opposition representation. Islamists from the Muslim Brotherhood won twenty to twenty-five seats. Leftists and pan-Arabists won fifteen to twenty seats. Tribal loyalists secured twenty to twenty-five seats. Independents and others filled remaining seats. This parliament was more representative than any since independence. Opposition could organize legally. Criticism of government policy was permitted. Newspapers published dissenting views. Civil society organizations expanded. For brief moment, Jordan appeared to be democratizing.

But Hussein maintained absolute control over what mattered. The king appointed the prime minister and cabinet regardless of parliament's composition. The king controlled military and security services directly. The king could dissolve parliament at will. Martial law remained in effect, giving security services sweeping powers. The mukhabarat continued surveilling opposition. Real power remained with the monarchy. The democratic opening was safety valve, allowing controlled dissent to prevent explosion, not genuine power-sharing. When Hussein felt threatened, he would close it completely.

The Gulf War Miscalculation: Isolation and Its Price

On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, triggering crisis that would reshape the Middle East and nearly destroy Jordan economically. Saddam Hussein's forces conquered Kuwait in hours, claiming historical Iraqi sovereignty over what Iraq characterized as artificial British creation carved from Ottoman Basra province. The international community responded with immediate condemnation. United Nations Security Council demanded Iraqi withdrawal. The United States began assembling coalition to liberate Kuwait by force if necessary.

Jordan's Hussein faced impossible choice with catastrophic consequences regardless of decision. Supporting the coalition against Iraq would align Jordan with the United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and international community. This would maintain American aid and Arab financial support. But Iraqi military could respond by closing Jordan's land trade route through Iraq, devastating Jordan's economy. More importantly, Jordan's population, particularly Palestinians, overwhelmingly sympathized with Iraq. Saddam portrayed the invasion as standing against American imperialism and redistributing Arab wealth from corrupt Gulf monarchies to the Arab masses. This resonated powerfully among Palestinians and poor Jordanians who resented Gulf wealth concentration while they struggled with unemployment and austerity.

Supporting Iraq would maintain the crucial Iraqi economic relationship and satisfy popular sentiment. Jordan depended on Iraqi oil provided at subsidized prices through pipeline. Jordan's exports went primarily to Iraq. The Iraqi market was essential for Jordanian businesses. But supporting Iraq would bring American and Saudi condemnation, aid cuts, potential sanctions, and international isolation. It would destroy Jordan's relationship with Gulf states that provided hundreds of millions in aid annually.

Hussein chose attempted neutrality that tilted unmistakably toward Iraq. He refused to join the coalition. He maintained trade with Iraq despite United Nations sanctions. He allowed Jordanian volunteers to join Iraqi military. He criticized the coalition's military buildup in Saudi Arabia. He advocated for "Arab solution" to the crisis, meaning negotiations that would allow Saddam to save face rather than military liberation of Kuwait. He privately worked to broker compromises that would prevent war while preserving some Iraqi gains.

This was catastrophic miscalculation. Hussein bet that Saddam would negotiate withdrawal, avoid war, and survive with Iraq intact. He bet that the United States wouldn't actually wage full-scale war, that international support would fracture, that economic pressure would eventually produce negotiated settlement. He bet wrong on every count. The coalition forces, led by the United States, launched Operation Desert Storm in January 1991. They liberated Kuwait in hundred-hour ground war, crushing Iraqi military with overwhelming technological and numerical superiority. Saddam survived but Iraq was devastated economically and militarily.

Jordan paid immediate and severe price. American aid was reduced from approximately fifty million dollars annually to twenty million dollars. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait cut aid entirely in punishment for Jordan's stance. The Arab League suspended most aid to Jordan. Total loss

reached three hundred to four hundred million dollars annually. Worse, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia expelled hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and Jordanians who had been working in Gulf states, punishing them for PLO and Jordanian support of Iraq. Approximately three hundred thousand workers and their families returned to Jordan unemployed, traumatized, and requiring government services Jordan couldn't afford. Remittances collapsed from approximately six hundred million dollars annually to two hundred million dollars, further devastating household incomes.

Trade with Iraq, Jordan's main market, was impossible due to United Nations sanctions. Jordan couldn't openly trade with sanctioned Iraq without violating international law and facing secondary sanctions. Black market trade continued but was reduced and risky. The Iraqi market that had absorbed Jordanian exports disappeared. Jordan lost approximately forty percent of its export market overnight.

The combined impact was economic catastrophe. Gross domestic product contracted approximately ten percent in 1991. Unemployment rose to twenty-five to thirty percent. Per capita income fell from roughly thirteen hundred dollars to eleven hundred dollars. Poverty increased to thirty percent or more of the population. The debt remained at eight billion dollars, now representing two hundred percent of sharply reduced gross domestic product. Jordan faced potential state failure.

Recovery Through Realignment: The Price of Survival

Hussein recognized within months that the Gulf War stance had been disastrous error. Jordan's survival required repairing relations with the United States and normalizing relations with Israel. These steps would restore American aid and rehabilitate Jordan internationally. Palestinian opposition was expected and manageable. Jordan's structural foundations, the Bedouin military and external support, required American backing above all else.

The peace process with Israel had been developing secretly for years. Jordan and Israel had maintained back-channel communications since the 1950s. Both sides had strategic interest in cooperation. Israel wanted peaceful borders and Jordan as buffer against Syria and Iraq. Jordan wanted to prevent Israeli expansion into West Bank and eventually receive international support for regime stability. The 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO created opening for Jordanian-Israeli peace by addressing Palestinian-Israeli conflict separately.

On October 26, 1994, King Hussein and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed Treaty of Peace between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in ceremony at Wadi Araba border crossing. Jordan became the second Arab state to normalize relations with Israel after Egypt's 1979 treaty. The treaty provided immediate benefits Jordan desperately needed.

The United States forgave approximately seven hundred million dollars in Jordanian debt and increased aid to two hundred to three hundred million dollars annually. This was explicit reward for peace with Israel. American officials made clear that Jordan's aid levels would depend on maintaining peace treaty and cooperating with American regional policy. The message was

unmistakable: Jordan's survival required serving American interests, and peace with Israel was core American interest.

Jordan received access to American military equipment that had been restricted previously. The Jordanian military began receiving advanced weapons systems, training, and integration with American forces. This strengthened the regime militarily and bound the military more tightly to American patronage. The officers understood that weapons, spare parts, and training all depended on maintaining American relationship, which meant maintaining peace with Israel.

The treaty allocated water rights from the Jordan River and Yarmouna River to Jordan, addressing chronic water scarcity. Israel controlled most water resources in the region through occupation of West Bank and Golan Heights. The treaty required Israel to provide Jordan with specified water quantities. This was tangible benefit affecting agriculture and urban water supply, though critics noted that Israel was allocating water it had controlled through conquest, not its own resources.

Economic normalization opened trade opportunities. Qualified Industrial Zones were established allowing Jordanian exports with Israeli content to enter American markets duty-free. Jordanian businesses could trade with Israel legally. Tourism expanded as borders opened. These economic benefits were modest initially but represented potential for growth.

The Jordanian population, particularly Palestinians comprising sixty percent, overwhelmingly opposed the treaty. They viewed it as betrayal, normalizing relations with the occupier while Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza remained under Israeli military rule. The treaty effectively acknowledged Israeli control over territories from which many Jordanian Palestinians had been displaced. Protests erupted in Amman and other cities. Opposition parties, particularly Islamists and leftists, condemned the treaty as surrender. Professional associations boycotted normalization activities. Popular anger was intense and widespread.

But Hussein calculated, accurately, that regime survival required American support more than popular approval. The Bedouin military remained loyal, supporting peace with Israel because it restored American aid funding their salaries and weapons. The mukhabarat suppressed opposition efficiently, arresting protest leaders and preventing sustained organizing against the treaty. Parliament, which Hussein could dissolve at will, ratified the treaty after pressure from regime. Economic crisis had demonstrated brutally that Jordan couldn't survive without external support. Pride couldn't feed families. Ideological purity couldn't pay government salaries. Pragmatic accommodation with Israel and alignment with American policy were prices of survival.

The treaty succeeded economically. Debt burden was reduced. Aid resumed at levels sufficient to stabilize government finances. Investment increased modestly as international perception of Jordan as stable improved. Gross domestic product grew at five to six percent annually through the mid-1990s. Unemployment declined slightly from crisis peaks. The economic stabilization allowed regime to weather Palestinian opposition. The system proved that it could survive

popular disapproval as long as the Bedouin military remained loyal and external patrons continued funding.

The pattern was established definitively: Jordan survived by serving external powers' strategic interests, not by representing its population's political preferences. Democracy was impossible because it would produce government reflecting majority Palestinian sentiment, which was hostile to Israel and American policy. Authoritarianism was necessary because only authoritarianism could enforce unpopular policies required to maintain external support. The peace treaty confirmed that Jordan's political structure served external patrons and internal elite minority, not the majority population.

Hussein's Death and His Successor: Continuity of System

On February 7, 1999, King Hussein died of lymphatic cancer after forty-seven year reign, one of the longest of any twentieth century monarch. He had survived assassination attempts, coups, wars, economic crises, and internal rebellions that destroyed other Middle Eastern monarchies. He left Jordan poor but stable, authoritarian but functional, dependent but surviving.

His successor was his son Abdullah II, who had been crown prince for only two weeks before Hussein's death. Hussein had originally designated his brother Hassan as heir, but changed succession in his final days, apparently concluding that Abdullah, with his military training and connections to tribal networks through his mother, would be better suited to maintaining regime stability. Abdullah was educated at Sandhurst, Britain's military academy, and had served in Jordanian military, giving him connections to officer corps that would prove essential.

Abdullah inherited the system Hussein had consolidated: authoritarian monarchy ruling through Bedouin-dominated military, funded by American subsidy averaging two hundred to three hundred million dollars annually, economically dependent on remittances from Jordanians working abroad, politically structured to exclude Palestinian majority from power despite comprising sixty to sixty-five percent of population by 1999. He also inherited massive challenges: youth unemployment exceeding thirty percent, poverty affecting twenty to twenty-five percent of population, external debt still around eight billion dollars, water scarcity worsening due to population growth and climate change, and Palestinian population increasingly frustrated with exclusion from power and continued Israeli occupation of West Bank.

Abdullah continued his father's policies with remarkable consistency. The same tribal-military alliance remained regime foundation. The same external dependence on American aid continued. The same repression of political opposition intensified under expanded mukhabarat powers. The same exclusion of Palestinians from political power persisted despite demographic realities. Parliament remained weak institution that could be dissolved when inconvenient. Elections were manipulated through gerrymandering that over-represented rural Bedouin areas and under-represented urban Palestinian areas. Political parties were constrained. Media was controlled. Civil society was restricted.

The economic structure remained fundamentally unchanged. Jordan's gross domestic product in 1999 was approximately eight billion dollars with population of approximately five million, producing per capita income of roughly sixteen hundred dollars annually. This was identical in real terms to 1984, meaning fifteen years of crisis and adjustment had produced no growth in average living standards. Unemployment remained around fifteen percent officially, twenty-five to thirty percent among youth. Poverty affected approximately twenty to twenty-five percent of population. Remittances still provided twenty to twenty-five percent of gross domestic product. Foreign aid still provided fifteen to twenty percent. External debt remained around eight billion dollars, approximately one hundred percent of gross domestic product.

By 1999, Jordan had existed for seventy-eight years since Abdullah I's arrival in 1921. The kingdom had survived World War II, Arab-Israeli wars in 1948, 1967, and 1973, Black September civil war in 1970, economic booms and busts, Gulf War isolation, and Hussein's death. It had absorbed Palestinian refugee populations in 1948 and 1967 that doubled its population without collapsing into ethnic civil war like Lebanon. It had maintained stability while wealthier, more developed neighbors like Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon descended into dictatorship, war, and chaos.

But Jordan had never achieved genuine independence, economic self-sufficiency, democratic governance, or resolution of its fundamental demographic-political contradiction. After seventy-eight years, the kingdom still depended on external subsidy for survival. It still excluded the majority population from political power through minority military dominance. It still required authoritarianism because democracy would produce Palestinian-majority government ending East Bank Bedouin control. It remained desperately poor with per capita income around sixteen hundred dollars despite decades of supposed development. The system worked in the narrow sense that the monarchy survived. But it worked only because external powers, currently the United States, calculated that subsidizing Jordan's stability was cheaper than managing instability that its collapse would create.

Hussein's reign had revealed Jordan's essential character. The kingdom survived not through strength but through weakness that made it not worth conquering. It survived not through popular legitimacy but through military dominance by loyal minority funded by external powers. It survived not through economic development but through dependence on remittances and aid. It survived not through democracy but through authoritarianism that prevented the majority from exercising majority rule.

This was the system Abdullah II inherited in 1999. This was the system that would face its greatest test in 2011 when Arab Spring protests threatened monarchies throughout the region. And this was the system that would continue, with minor adjustments, into 2025. Part 4 will examine whether this system of survival through poverty, dependence, and authoritarianism can continue indefinitely, or whether Jordan's accumulated vulnerabilities are finally catching up with the artificial state Britain created and Hussein preserved through four decades of ruthless pragmatism.

Jordan: Stability Through Poverty - A Mandate Successor State Case Study

Part 4: Contemporary Jordan - Permanent Crisis, Relative Stability (1999-2025)

Abdullah II: Inheriting the System, Preserving the Pattern

When Abdullah II assumed the throne on February 7, 1999, at age thirty-seven, observers questioned whether the relatively young king could maintain his father's intricate balancing act. Hussein had ruled for forty-seven years, becoming the regime's personification. His relationships with tribal sheikhs, his connections with American officials, his reputation as survivor who had navigated countless crises—all of this was personal to Hussein. Could his son, who had spent years outside Jordan at British military academy and had been crown prince for only two weeks, command the same loyalty?

The answer came quickly. Abdullah demonstrated that the system Hussein built didn't require Hussein's personal charisma to function. The structures were self-sustaining because they served the material interests of those with power to sustain or destroy them. The Bedouin-dominated military remained loyal because their privileged positions depended on the monarchy's survival, not on which Hashemite sat on the throne. American support continued because Jordan's strategic value to American policy remained unchanged. The mukhabarat's repressive capacity functioned regardless of who commanded it. The system was institutional, not personal.

Abdullah moved immediately to consolidate control through familiar mechanisms. He promoted loyalists within the military, ensuring officer corps remained dominated by East Bank Bedouins from tribes with historic ties to the Hashemites. He expanded the mukhabarat, giving security services increased surveillance capabilities including new technologies for monitoring communications and infiltrating opposition groups. He appointed prime ministers from established East Bank families who could be relied upon to implement unpopular policies without political ambitions threatening royal authority. He maintained the gerrymandered electoral system that ensured parliamentary majorities came from rural Bedouin constituencies regardless of popular vote distribution.

The economic situation Abdullah inherited was precarious but not catastrophic. Jordan's gross domestic product in 1999 stood at approximately eight billion dollars with population of five million, producing per capita income around sixteen hundred dollars

annually. This was identical in real terms to 1984 levels, meaning fifteen years of economic crisis and structural adjustment had produced zero growth in average living standards. Unemployment officially measured fifteen percent but youth unemployment exceeded thirty percent, meaning approximately one-third of young people entering the labor market couldn't find work. Poverty affected twenty to twenty-five percent of the population, concentrated in rural areas and refugee camps. External debt remained around eight billion dollars, approximately one hundred percent of gross domestic product.

But the debt was manageable because Jordan had successfully negotiated rescheduling with international creditors and maintained access to American aid. The United States provided approximately two hundred to three hundred million dollars annually in direct aid plus additional military assistance. This aid continued because Jordan served American strategic interests: maintaining peace with Israel, hosting American military facilities, cooperating with American intelligence operations in the region, and providing moderate voice supporting American policy. The aid wasn't development assistance designed to help Jordan achieve self-sufficiency. It was payment for services rendered, renewable annually based on continued cooperation.

Remittances from Jordanians working abroad remained crucial, providing approximately twenty to twenty-five percent of gross domestic product. By the early 2000s, approximately five hundred thousand to six hundred thousand Jordanians worked in Gulf states, sending home approximately one point five to two billion dollars annually. These remittances supported household consumption and stabilized the economy, but they remained vulnerable to economic conditions in Gulf states and to political decisions by Gulf governments about foreign worker policies.

The fundamental economic structure remained unchanged from Hussein's era. Jordan produced little the world wanted to buy. Exports consisted primarily of phosphate, potash, some agricultural products, and textiles manufactured in Qualified Industrial Zones that received preferential access to American markets due to Jordanian-Israeli content requirements. Imports far exceeded exports, creating permanent trade deficit financed by aid, remittances, and borrowing. The economy was service-oriented, with government employment absorbing educated workers who couldn't find private sector jobs. This created bloated civil service consuming government revenues but providing minimal productive output.

Abdullah's early years focused on economic reform rhetoric that promised modernization, privatization, and integration into global economy. He portrayed himself as young reformer breaking from his father's generation, emphasizing technology, efficiency, and business-friendly policies. Aqaba Special Economic Zone was established in 2001, offering tax incentives to attract investment. Telecommunications, electricity, and other state enterprises were partially privatized. Regulations were streamlined. Free trade agreements were negotiated with the United States and other countries.

These reforms produced modest benefits. Gross domestic product growth averaged five to six percent annually from 2000 to 2008, driven primarily by construction boom, expansion of services, and foreign investment in tourism and real estate. But the growth was uneven and unstable. Wealth concentrated in Amman and among connected elites who could access investment opportunities, government contracts, and privatization deals. Rural areas and refugee camps saw minimal benefit. Youth unemployment remained persistently high. The reforms didn't address fundamental structural problems: dependence on external income sources, lack of competitive industries, demographic pressures from high birth rates, and water scarcity limiting agricultural development.

Most importantly, Abdullah maintained the political structure that excluded the Palestinian majority from power. Parliament remained weak institution that king could dissolve at will. Elections continued to be gerrymandered to over-represent rural East Bank constituencies. The electoral law ensured that even if opposition parties won popular vote plurality, they couldn't achieve parliamentary majority. Political parties remained restricted and marginalized. Real power stayed with appointed prime ministers, security services, and the monarchy. The facade of constitutional monarchy concealed reality of absolute rule constrained only by need to maintain tribal military loyalty and American support.

The 2011 Arab Spring: Surviving Through Calibrated Repression and Tactical Concessions

When protests erupted in Tunisia in December 2010, triggering wave of demonstrations across the Arab world that would topple governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, Jordan appeared vulnerable. The kingdom shared characteristics with states experiencing revolutions: authoritarian rule, economic stagnation, youth unemployment, corruption, and populations demanding dignity, jobs, and political voice. If Arab Spring could overthrow Mubarak's Egypt and Ben Ali's Tunisia, could it topple the Hashemite monarchy?

The protests began in Jordan in January 2011, initially small demonstrations in Amman and other cities. Protesters demanded political reforms, anti-corruption measures, economic improvements, and greater political participation. The protests were notably different from those in other Arab countries in crucial way: they didn't demand regime change. Most protesters called for reform within the existing system, not revolution. They wanted King Abdullah to dismiss unpopular prime ministers, reduce corruption, reform parliament, and improve economic conditions. But they generally accepted monarchy and didn't call for Abdullah's overthrow.

This reflected Jordan's unusual political structure. The Bedouin-dominated East Bank population, which provided regime's foundation, had legitimate economic grievances about unemployment and declining living standards, but they benefited from the system through military employment, government jobs, and patronage networks. They wanted reforms that would improve their economic position, not revolution that might empower

Palestinian majority. Palestinian Jordanians had deeper political grievances about exclusion from power, but they also calculated that revolution risked civil war. Black September's memory remained vivid. Palestinians knew the Bedouin military would defend the monarchy violently if threatened. Attempting revolution meant risking catastrophic bloodshed with uncertain outcome.

Abdullah responded with characteristic combination of tactical concessions and firm repression. He dismissed the prime minister, appointing new government and promising reforms. He announced constitutional amendments expanding parliament's role and creating constitutional court. He increased bread subsidies, raised civil service salaries, and approved public sector hiring. These measures cost money Jordan didn't have, forcing increased borrowing, but they reduced immediate pressure.

Simultaneously, security forces responded to protests with controlled but effective repression. The mukhabarat infiltrated opposition groups, identified leaders, and arrested them on various pretexts. Protests were allowed to continue in designated areas under police supervision but prevented from growing large enough to threaten stability. When protests grew too large or moved toward restricted areas like royal palaces or government buildings, police used force to disperse them. Some protesters were beaten. Some were detained. The violence was carefully calibrated—enough to demonstrate state power and deter escalation, but not so extreme as to trigger outrage that might expand protest movements.

The Muslim Brotherhood's Islamic Action Front, Jordan's largest opposition party, participated in protests but stopped short of revolutionary demands. The Brotherhood calculated that regime change might bring chaos benefiting no one, while sustained pressure might produce reforms. They demanded constitutional monarchy with genuine parliamentary power, free elections, and end to corruption. But they accepted monarchy's continued existence, focusing demands on limiting royal power rather than eliminating it.

The tribal populations that formed regime's base issued statements supporting King Abdullah while criticizing government corruption and economic policies. This was traditional pattern: tribes expressed loyalty to monarch personally while blaming appointed officials for problems. This allowed Abdullah to dismiss prime ministers and cabinet members as scapegoats while preserving his own authority. The tribal statements warned implicitly that tribes would defend monarchy if Palestinians attempted revolution, reinforcing message that revolutionary change would trigger civil war.

External support proved crucial. The United States explicitly backed Abdullah throughout the crisis, with President Obama and other officials publicly supporting Jordan's stability. American aid continued without interruption. Additional emergency assistance was provided. The message was clear: the United States would support Abdullah's survival. Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, provided emergency financial

assistance totaling approximately one billion dollars over 2011-2012 to help Jordan weather the crisis. This aid allowed Abdullah to increase subsidies and salaries, buying off discontent.

By late 2011, protests had declined significantly. They continued intermittently through 2012 but never achieved the size or persistence that toppled governments elsewhere. Jordan had survived Arab Spring through combination of factors: regime's unique structure where majority Palestinian population couldn't risk revolution without triggering civil war, tactical concessions reducing immediate grievances, calibrated repression preventing protest escalation, tribal base reaffirming loyalty to monarchy, and massive external support ensuring regime could afford concessions.

The constitutional amendments passed in 2011 produced minimal actual change. Parliament gained slightly expanded powers to question ministers and propose laws, but it couldn't remove prime ministers or form governments. The king retained authority to appoint governments, dissolve parliament, and veto legislation. The electoral law reforms slightly reduced gerrymandering but maintained structural over-representation of rural areas. Opposition parties remained marginalized. The mukhabarat's powers expanded through new legislation ostensibly fighting terrorism but actually enabling increased surveillance of opposition.

The Arab Spring's most significant impact on Jordan was demonstrating what hadn't changed. After months of protests and promises of reform, the fundamental power structure remained intact. The monarchy controlled military and security services. The Bedouin minority dominated political power. Palestinians comprised approximately sixty-five percent of population but held minimal political influence. Real reforms that would democratize Jordan, such as proportional representation, ending gerrymandering, or granting parliament power to form governments, never occurred because they would empower Palestinian majority and threaten East Bank Bedouin dominance. The system proved remarkably resilient precisely because those with power to overthrow it calculated that preserving it served their interests better than revolution.

The Syrian Refugee Crisis: Absorbing a Million People Without Collapse

Beginning in March 2011, the same month protests began in Jordan, Syria descended into civil war that would become the century's greatest humanitarian catastrophe. Peaceful protests against Assad's regime in Daraa, a Syrian city near Jordan's border, triggered brutal military crackdown. Assad chose genocidal repression over political compromise. Syria's uprising became armed rebellion, then civil war, then apocalyptic conflict involving multiple factions, foreign interventions, chemical weapons attacks, barrel bombing of civilian areas, siege warfare, and displacement of more than half Syria's pre-war population of twenty-three million.

For Jordan, Syria's catastrophe meant absorbing refugee flows on scale that would have destroyed most states. Syrian refugees began arriving at Jordan's border in 2011, initially

in hundreds, then thousands, then tens of thousands monthly. By 2013, refugees were arriving at rates exceeding one hundred thousand per month during peak periods. Jordan kept its borders open longer than most neighboring countries, allowing Syrians to enter and seek refuge. This was partly humanitarian but also strategic calculation. Closing borders would create desperate populations on Jordan's frontier potentially destabilizing border regions. Better to allow entry and manage refugees inside Jordan with international assistance.

By 2015, Jordan hosted approximately one point three to one point four million Syrian refugees according to Jordanian government estimates, though official UNHCR registration counted approximately six hundred fifty thousand. The discrepancy reflected many Syrians entering Jordan informally or not registering with UNHCR. Using the higher Jordanian government estimate, this meant Syria refugees comprised approximately fifteen to twenty percent of Jordan's total population of seven million. This would be equivalent to the United States absorbing forty-five to fifty million refugees in three years.

The demographic impact was staggering. Jordan's population increased from approximately six point five million in 2011 to roughly eight million by 2015, a twenty-three percent increase in four years almost entirely from refugee influx. The refugees concentrated in northern governorates near Syrian border, particularly Mafraq and Irbid, where they sometimes outnumbered local populations. Zaatari refugee camp, established in 2012 near Mafraq, became Jordan's fourth-largest city virtually overnight, housing approximately eighty thousand people at its peak. Azraq camp, opened in 2014, housed another fifty thousand.

But most refugees lived outside camps, settling in towns and cities where they strained infrastructure designed for much smaller populations. Hospitals and clinics faced patient loads exceeding capacity by fifty to one hundred percent in affected areas. Schools operated double shifts to accommodate Syrian children, with Jordanian children attending morning sessions and Syrian children attending afternoon sessions. Water infrastructure, already stressed by Jordan's severe water scarcity, faced unsustainable demand. Housing costs increased sharply as demand exceeded supply, hurting both refugees and poor Jordanians. Wages declined in sectors where Syrians competed with Jordanians for work, particularly construction, agriculture, and services.

The economic impact was severe but manageable only because international community provided substantial assistance. The UNHCR, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Union, United States, and various bilateral donors provided approximately one to one point five billion dollars annually in humanitarian assistance and budget support from 2012 onward. This funding paid for refugee camps, humanitarian services, healthcare, education, food assistance, and infrastructure expansion. Without this external support, Jordan couldn't have absorbed refugees without economic collapse or forced border closures.

But even with international assistance, the burden on Jordanian economy and society was enormous. Unemployment increased from approximately twelve to thirteen percent in 2011 to approximately fifteen to eighteen percent by 2016, driven partly by refugee competition for jobs. Youth unemployment exceeded thirty to thirty-five percent. Government budget deficits expanded as spending on services increased while revenues remained constrained. Infrastructure deteriorated faster than maintenance could address due to increased usage. Water availability per capita declined as population grew faster than water resources could be developed.

Social tensions emerged between Jordanians and refugees. In northern towns, some Jordanians resented refugees for driving up housing costs, increasing competition for jobs, straining public services, and changing community character. Incidents of harassment and discrimination occurred. Some municipalities imposed informal restrictions on refugees. The government responded by attempting to channel refugees into camps rather than urban areas, but most refugees preferred urban areas where they had more freedom and better economic opportunities despite hardships.

The Syrian refugee crisis revealed Jordan's economic fragility and its dependence on external support. Jordan absorbed refugees because international community paid for it and because closing borders would create worse problems. But absorption didn't mean integration. Syrian refugees faced severe restrictions on employment, movement, and rights. Work permits were difficult to obtain. Most refugees worked informally in precarious conditions for exploitative wages. They couldn't vote, own property, or access most government services beyond emergency healthcare and education. They were tolerated but not incorporated into Jordanian society.

By 2025, approximately fourteen years after Syria's war began, approximately six hundred fifty thousand to seven hundred thousand Syrians remained in Jordan according to UNHCR registration. Many had returned to Syria, particularly to areas that stabilized under Assad's control, despite devastation and continued repression. Others had resettled in third countries through UNHCR programs, though these programs accepted only small fractions of refugees. The majority remained in Jordan in indefinite limbo, unable to return safely to Syria, unable to integrate fully into Jordan, and unable to access resettlement.

Jordan's absorption of Syrian refugees demonstrated the kingdom's remarkable capacity to survive crises through external support and pragmatic adaptation. No other country of Jordan's size and poverty absorbed refugees at comparable scale without collapsing. But it also demonstrated Jordan's unchanged character: the kingdom survived by serving international community's interests, accepting refugees as humanitarian obligation while extracting maximum international financial support in exchange, and managing crisis through authoritarian control that prevented refugee populations from organizing or challenging state authority.

Economic Stagnation and Youth Unemployment: The Permanent Crisis

By the 2010s and 2020s, Jordan's economic trajectory had settled into pattern of chronic stagnation punctuated by occasional modest growth but never achieving sustained development that would transform living standards or create employment matching educated workforce. This wasn't cyclical downturn awaiting recovery. This was structural condition reflecting Jordan's fundamental economic constraints: limited natural resources, water scarcity, small domestic market, regional instability limiting trade, and dependence on external income that Jordan couldn't control.

Gross domestic product growth averaged two to three percent annually through most of the 2010s, barely exceeding population growth of approximately two to two point five percent. This meant per capita income remained essentially stagnant. In 2010, per capita GDP measured approximately four thousand two hundred dollars. By 2019, it had reached approximately four thousand three hundred dollars, representing virtually no growth over nine years. The Syrian refugee influx and slow growth combined to dilute economic gains across larger population.

The COVID-19 pandemic devastated Jordan's economy in 2020. GDP contracted by approximately two percent. Tourism, one of Jordan's few successful export industries, collapsed completely as international travel halted. Remittances declined as Gulf economies faced oil price collapse and pandemic-related contractions. Unemployment spiked to twenty-three percent officially, with youth unemployment exceeding forty-five percent. The government borrowed heavily to support economy and fund pandemic response, pushing public debt to approximately one hundred ten percent of GDP by 2021.

Recovery from pandemic was slow and incomplete. By 2024-2025, GDP per capita had recovered to approximately four thousand five hundred to four thousand seven hundred dollars, roughly equivalent to 2019 levels in real terms. This meant fifteen years of economic growth had produced minimal improvement in average living standards. For young Jordanians entering the workforce since 2010, economic stagnation was the only economy they had known. Their parents remembered modest prosperity in the 1970s and 1980s. The younger generation knew only unemployment, informal work, and frustrated expectations.

Youth unemployment became Jordan's defining social crisis. Official unemployment rates measured fifteen to eighteen percent through the 2010s and 2020s, but youth unemployment consistently exceeded thirty percent and reached forty-five to fifty percent in pandemic years. Among university graduates, unemployment was even higher, with estimates suggesting fifty to sixty percent of recent graduates couldn't find work matching their education. This created perverse situation where education, which was supposed to improve employment prospects, instead created frustrated educated class unable to find professional employment.

The unemployment reflected structural problems. Jordan produced approximately sixty thousand to seventy thousand university graduates annually, but economy created

perhaps thirty thousand to forty thousand new jobs annually, mostly in informal sectors paying low wages. Government employment, traditionally absorbing educated workers, had reached limits of fiscal sustainability. Private sector remained small and concentrated in services, construction, and retail that required less education. The mismatch between educational output and economic opportunities was fundamental and worsening.

Young Jordanians responded to unemployment through multiple strategies, none of which solved the underlying problem. Some continued education, pursuing graduate degrees while waiting for job markets to improve, creating ever-more educated population competing for same limited opportunities. Some accepted informal work or employment far below their education levels, driving taxis or working retail despite engineering degrees or business qualifications. Some emigrated to Gulf states if they could obtain work visas, joining Jordan's diaspora and sending remittances home but depriving Jordan of educated workers. Some simply withdrew from labor market entirely, supported by families, creating hidden unemployment not captured in official statistics.

The social consequences of sustained youth unemployment were profound. Young people delayed marriage because they couldn't afford it, contributing to declining marriage rates and rising age at first marriage. Frustration and hopelessness spread, visible in surveys showing majority of young Jordanians wanted to emigrate if given opportunity. Political disengagement increased as young people concluded that government couldn't or wouldn't address their concerns. The educated, unemployed youth who might have driven economic and political change instead became resigned to diminished expectations.

The government's response remained inadequate. Rhetorical commitments to job creation, entrepreneurship programs, and private sector development produced minimal results. Public works programs provided temporary employment but no sustainable solutions. The fundamental problem was that Jordan's economy couldn't generate sufficient formal employment for its population, and the government lacked resources to create jobs directly while maintaining necessary services and security spending.

Water Crisis: Running Dry in the Desert

Jordan's water scarcity, always severe, became crisis during the 2010s and 2020s as population growth, Syrian refugee influx, climate change impacts, and infrastructure limitations combined to create situation approaching catastrophe. Jordan had always been one of the world's most water-scarce countries, with renewable water resources per capita among the lowest globally. But what had been manageable scarcity with four million people in 1990 became acute crisis with eight to nine million by 2020s.

Jordan's annual renewable water resources totaled approximately nine hundred million cubic meters, but population growth and increased demand meant per capita availability declined from approximately six hundred fifty cubic meters per person in 1990 to

approximately one hundred forty cubic meters per person by 2020. The international water scarcity threshold is one thousand cubic meters per person per year. Jordan was operating at one-seventh of this threshold, entering category of absolute water scarcity where economic development and health are severely compromised.

The Syrian refugee crisis exacerbated water scarcity dramatically. Northern governorates hosting largest refugee concentrations experienced water demand increases of fifty to one hundred percent within few years. Infrastructure designed for smaller populations couldn't meet demand. Many areas received municipal water only once per week, forcing residents to store water in tanks and ration consumption carefully. During summer months when demand peaked, some areas went weeks without municipal water delivery.

Groundwater aquifers, traditionally supplementing surface water, were being depleted at rates far exceeding natural recharge. The Disi aquifer, located in southern Jordan near Saudi border and estimated to contain enough water for fifty to one hundred years at 2000s consumption rates, was being pumped at unsustainable rates to supply Amman. But this was fossil water, not renewable, meaning it would eventually be exhausted. The Azraq basin, once supporting permanent wetlands, had been pumped so heavily that the wetlands essentially disappeared, replaced by salt flats, and the aquifer's water quality was deteriorating from increased salinity.

Agriculture, consuming approximately fifty to sixty percent of Jordan's water use, faced impossible choices. Jordan had traditionally grown water-intensive crops like tomatoes, cucumbers, and citrus fruits for export, but continuing this required either depleting aquifers unsustainably or diverting water from municipal use. Farmers with access to groundwater pumped illegally, drilling unauthorized wells or exceeding permitted extraction levels. The government attempted to regulate extraction but lacked enforcement capacity. The Jordan Valley, the country's most productive agricultural region, faced water shortages that reduced planted area and crop yields.

Climate change worsened the situation measurably. Rainfall in Jordan had declined approximately ten to fifteen percent since 1960s according to meteorological data. Temperatures had increased approximately one to one point five degrees Celsius. Evaporation rates had increased. These trends were projected to continue and accelerate, with climate models predicting rainfall declines of twenty to thirty percent by mid-century and temperature increases of two to three degrees. This would reduce water availability further just as population continued growing.

The government pursued multiple strategies to address water crisis, all insufficient to close the gap between supply and demand. The Disi water conveyance project, completed in 2013, brought groundwater from southern desert to Amman through three hundred kilometer pipeline at cost exceeding one billion dollars. This increased Amman's supply by approximately one hundred million cubic meters annually but depleted non-renewable aquifer. Desalination plants on the Red Sea coast near Aqaba

were built, but desalination was expensive and energy-intensive, requiring either subsidies making water unaffordable or government absorbing costs.

The Red Sea-Dead Sea canal project, proposed for decades as ambitious solution that would generate hydroelectric power, desalinate water, and stabilize the Dead Sea's declining water level, remained in planning with uncertain funding and environmental concerns. Wastewater treatment expansion allowed reuse for agriculture, but this required infrastructure investment Jordan struggled to finance. Public awareness campaigns encouraged water conservation, but individual conservation couldn't close gap measured in hundreds of millions of cubic meters.

By 2025, Jordan's water situation represented permanent crisis requiring continuous emergency measures and international assistance. Water shortages constrained economic development, limited agricultural production, created public health risks, and contributed to social instability. Future population growth would intensify crisis further. Climate change would reduce available water. No solutions on horizon offered sustainable resolution. Jordan would remain desperately water-scarce indefinitely, managing chronic shortage through rationing, imports, external assistance, and hope that technological advances or political settlements might improve situation.

American Aid: The Permanent Subsidy

Throughout Abdullah II's reign, American aid remained absolutely essential to Jordan's survival, following pattern established under Abdullah I and Hussein. The United States provided approximately three hundred fifty to four hundred million dollars annually in direct economic and military assistance, supplemented by loan guarantees, debt relief, and emergency assistance during crises. Over Abdullah II's first twenty-five years, total American assistance exceeded ten billion dollars, approximately equivalent to one year of Jordan's GDP.

The aid served explicit purposes tied to American strategic interests in the region. Jordan maintained peace treaty with Israel, providing stable border that reduced Israeli security concerns and allowed Israeli-Jordanian security cooperation against mutual threats. Jordan hosted American military facilities, including training bases, intelligence operations, and logistical infrastructure supporting American operations in Iraq, Syria, and broader Middle East. Jordan cooperated extensively with American intelligence agencies, sharing information and conducting joint operations against terrorist organizations.

Jordan participated in American-led coalitions against ISIS from 2014 onward, conducting airstrikes against ISIS positions in Syria and Iraq. When ISIS burned alive captured Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh in February 2015, releasing video of his murder, Jordan intensified military operations with American support. This participation demonstrated Jordan's value to American regional strategy, reinforcing American commitment to maintaining Jordanian stability through continued aid.

The aid also served American interests by preventing Jordan's economic collapse, which would create refugee flows, security vacuum, and potential for extremist exploitation. American policymakers calculated that spending three hundred fifty to four hundred million dollars annually to maintain Jordan's stability was vastly cheaper than managing chaos that would result from Jordan's failure. This calculation was correct from American perspective. Jordan absorbed Syrian refugees, maintained stable border with Israel, cooperated with American operations, and required relatively modest subsidy compared to costs of direct American intervention.

But from Jordan's perspective, the aid confirmed permanent dependence on external patron. Jordan couldn't reduce defense spending because military was regime's foundation and American aid partially funded it. Jordan couldn't diversify foreign policy because American aid was conditional on alignment with American policy. Jordan couldn't democratize meaningfully because Palestinian-majority government might adopt foreign policy opposing American interests. Jordan couldn't criticize Israeli actions in occupied territories because this would anger American policymakers. The aid was lifeline preventing economic collapse, but it was also chains constraining Jordan's autonomy.

The aid levels remained relatively stable but never increased enough to transform Jordan's economy or address unemployment crisis. Three hundred fifty to four hundred million dollars annually represented approximately four to five percent of Jordan's GDP by 2020s, significant but not transformative. The aid kept government functioning, military equipped, and services minimally maintained. It didn't provide resources for massive infrastructure investment, industrial development, or job creation programs that might reduce unemployment or achieve self-sufficiency.

American officials periodically pressured Jordan to implement reforms, reduce corruption, improve governance, and liberalize economy. Jordan responded with rhetorical commitments and cosmetic changes that satisfied American demands without fundamentally altering power structure. Royal family and connected elites continued accumulating wealth through privileged access to contracts, privatization deals, and business opportunities. Corruption remained endemic. Governance remained authoritarian. But these problems were tolerable to American policymakers as long as Jordan continued serving American strategic interests.

The relationship was transactional. America paid Jordan for services rendered: maintaining peace with Israel, hosting American facilities, cooperating with American intelligence, participating in American military operations, absorbing refugees. Jordan delivered these services reliably and extracted maximum financial support possible. Neither side pretended this was partnership between equals or aid designed to help Jordan achieve independence from aid. This was patron-client relationship where client's survival depended on satisfying patron's strategic requirements.

Contemporary Jordan: The System Persists

By 2025, Jordan remained fundamentally unchanged from the artificial state Britain created in 1921 and Hussein consolidated through four decades of authoritarian rule. The monarchy survived through the same mechanisms: Bedouin-dominated military ensuring violence monopoly, external subsidy funding government operations, repression preventing opposition from organizing, and demographic-political structure excluding Palestinian majority from power.

The statistics in 2025 revealed continuity and stagnation:

Gross domestic product measured approximately fifty to fifty-five billion dollars with population of approximately ten to eleven million, producing per capita income of approximately four thousand five hundred to five thousand dollars. This represented modest growth from fifteen years earlier but remained below regional average and far below levels needed to provide employment and prosperity for young population. Jordan ranked as lower-middle income country, above extreme poverty but below prosperity.

Unemployment officially measured fifteen to eighteen percent, but this understated reality. Youth unemployment exceeded thirty-five to forty percent. Women's unemployment was even higher. Labor force participation among women remained low at thirty to thirty-five percent, partly due to cultural factors but also due to lack of opportunities. Hundreds of thousands of educated young people were unemployed or underemployed, working jobs far below their qualifications or not working at all.

Poverty affected approximately fifteen to twenty percent of population using national poverty line, meaning roughly one point five to two million people lived below subsistence level. Poverty was concentrated in rural areas, among refugees, and in certain urban neighborhoods. The middle class, small to begin with, faced pressure from inflation and stagnant wages. Only elite at the top, connected to royal family and government through patronage networks, enjoyed prosperity.

External debt reached approximately forty to forty-five billion dollars, approximately eighty to ninety percent of GDP. Debt service consumed significant portion of government budget, reducing resources available for services and development. Jordan remained dependent on International Monetary Fund programs providing loans conditional on austerity measures and reforms that often intensified hardship for poor and middle class.

Government budget continued relying heavily on external sources. American aid provided approximately three hundred fifty to four hundred million dollars annually. Other bilateral and multilateral donors provided additional hundreds of millions. Remittances from Jordanians working abroad contributed approximately three to four billion dollars annually, approximately seven to eight percent of GDP. Total external inflows represented fifteen to twenty percent of GDP, demonstrating unchanged dependence on income sources Jordan didn't control.

Water scarcity remained crisis level. Per capita water availability measured approximately one hundred forty to one hundred fifty cubic meters annually, one-seventh of international scarcity threshold. Many areas received municipal water only once weekly. Groundwater depletion continued unsustainably. Climate change was reducing rainfall and increasing temperatures, worsening water security. No solutions on horizon could close gap between supply and demand for growing population.

Syrian refugees numbered approximately six hundred fifty thousand registered with UNHCR plus perhaps additional two hundred thousand unregistered, totaling approximately eight hundred fifty thousand to nine hundred thousand. They remained in indefinite limbo, unable to return safely to Syria, unable to integrate fully into Jordan, unable to access third-country resettlement. Palestinian refugees from 1948 and 1967 numbered approximately two to two point five million, approximately twenty to twenty-five percent of population. Total refugee and refugee-descendant population exceeded three million, roughly thirty percent of Jordan's population.

Political structure remained authoritarian despite constitutional facade. King Abdullah II held absolute power over military, security services, foreign policy, and government formation. Parliament, elected through gerrymandered system over-representing rural East Bank areas, possessed minimal power. Real authority rested with appointed prime ministers and security services. Political parties were marginalized. Opposition was monitored, infiltrated, and repressed when it exceeded regime-tolerated limits. Freedom House rated Jordan as "Not Free" with low scores for political rights and civil liberties.

The demographic-political contradiction remained unresolved and unresolvable within existing structure. Palestinians and Palestinian-descended Jordanians comprised approximately sixty to sixty-five percent of population but were systematically excluded from political power and over-represented in unemployment and poverty. East Bank Bedouins, approximately thirty to thirty-five percent of population, dominated military, security services, and government through patronage networks. This minority ruled majority through monopoly on organized violence backed by external support. Democracy was impossible because it would produce Palestinian-majority government that would transform power structure. Authoritarianism was necessary to maintain East Bank dominance.

Why Jordan Survived When Wealthier Neighbors Collapsed

Jordan's survival through one hundred four years requires explanation because the kingdom appeared doomed from creation. It was artificial state carved from Ottoman territories without consideration for inhabitants' wishes. It lacked natural resources. It was desperately poor. It was ethnically divided between resentful East Bankers and Palestinian majority. It was surrounded by more powerful neighbors. It depended completely on external subsidy. By every measure, Jordan should have collapsed decades ago.

Yet Jordan remained stable through 2025 while wealthier, more developed neighbors descended into catastrophic violence. Iraq, despite oil wealth that should have enabled prosperity, experienced coups, wars, sanctions, invasion, civil war, and ISIS occupation. Syria, more populous and historically significant, descended into genocidal civil war killing five hundred thousand and displacing half its population. Lebanon, once prosperous, experienced civil war, Syrian occupation, Israeli invasions, political paralysis, economic collapse, and state failure. Even wealthy Gulf monarchies faced internal tensions and succession crises.

Jordan survived because of, not despite, the characteristics that appeared to be weaknesses.

Jordan's poverty meant limited stakes in controlling government. Iraq's oil generated one hundred billion dollars annually by 2010s, creating enormous incentive for elite competition and coups. Whoever controlled Iraqi government controlled oil revenues. This made Iraqi politics zero-sum struggle for survival and enrichment. Jordan's government controlled modest revenues from taxation, external aid, and state enterprises. Controlling Jordan's government meant access to patronage, but the amounts were limited. This reduced intensity of elite competition.

Jordan's lack of ideology beyond regime survival allowed flexibility impossible for ideological states. Syria's Baathism, Iraq's various ideological commitments, and Lebanon's confessionalism all constrained options during crises. Jordan's pragmatism, often criticized as opportunism, allowed rapid policy shifts serving regime survival. Hussein collaborated with British, then Americans, aligned against Nasser, then attempted neutrality in Gulf War, then aligned with America again. Abdullah II maintained these flexible alignments. Pragmatism was survival strategy.

Jordan's sectarian homogeneity, at least among East Bank populations controlling military, avoided sectarian civil war that destroyed Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. Jordan's division was ethnic-national, not sectarian. East Bank Sunnis and Palestinian Sunnis shared religion but not political identity. This allowed regime to prevent division from escalating to genocidal sectarian warfare. Syria's Alawite-Sunni divide, Iraq's Sunni-Shia divide, and Lebanon's multiple sectarian divisions all produced violence Jordan avoided.

Jordan's absorption of Palestinian refugees, while creating internal tensions, actually strengthened regime paradoxically. The Palestinian majority couldn't risk revolution because they knew East Bank Bedouin military would respond with overwhelming violence, as demonstrated in Black September. Palestinians in Jordan were better off than Palestinians in occupied territories or Lebanese refugee camps. This created perverse incentive structure where Palestinians accepted subordination because alternatives were worse.

Jordan's complete dependence on external subsidy made the kingdom valuable to external powers. A state with independent resources might pursue independent policies

threatening patron interests. Jordan's dependence guaranteed compliance. America and Gulf states paid to keep Jordan stable because they controlled it through financial leverage. Jordan's survival required satisfying patrons, so Jordan reliably satisfied them.

Jordan's Bedouin military base created stable foundation for authoritarian rule. Unlike Syria where Alawite minoritarian rule over Sunni majority eventually triggered civil war, or Iraq where Sunni rule over Shia majority produced coups and eventually American-enabled Shia ascendancy triggering Sunni insurgency, Jordan's Bedouin minority was large enough, geographically dispersed enough, and sufficiently integrated through tribal networks to maintain control without requiring genocidal violence. Repression was systematic but calibrated below levels that would trigger general uprising.

Most fundamentally, Jordan survived because external powers decided it should survive. Britain created Jordan to serve British interests. America sustained Jordan to serve American interests. As long as Jordan delivered strategic value, external powers would prevent its collapse through subsidy, military aid, debt relief, and occasional intervention. Jordan's geographic position between Israel, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Israel made it too strategically important to allow failure. This external guarantee, combined with internal structures that distributed patronage to those who could destroy regime, produced stability despite poverty.

The Unanswerable Question: Can This Continue?

In 2025, Jordan faced question that had haunted the kingdom for a century: could the system continue indefinitely, or would accumulated vulnerabilities eventually overwhelm regime's capacity to manage them?

The optimistic case for Jordan's continued survival rested on demonstrated resilience. Jordan had survived everything history had thrown at it: wars, refugee influxes, economic crises, Arab Spring protests, regional chaos. The system's fundamental structure, tribal-military alliance funded by external subsidy, had proven remarkably durable. American commitment to Jordan remained strong. Regional instability in Syria and Iraq made Jordan's stability even more valuable to external powers. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict's continuation meant Israel needed Jordan as stable border. As long as external powers calculated that maintaining Jordan was cheaper than managing its collapse, aid would continue.

The monarchy retained legitimacy among East Bank population through patronage and Hashemite historic claims. Abdullah II, while less charismatic than his father, governed competently enough to maintain system. The security services remained effective at preventing opposition from organizing. The military remained loyal because officers' material interests depended on regime survival. Jordanians of all backgrounds, while frustrated with economic conditions, generally preferred stability to revolutionary risk.

The memory of regional catastrophes, particularly Syria, served as deterrent to destabilization attempts.

But the pessimistic case identified accumulating vulnerabilities that might overwhelm regime's coping mechanisms:

Youth unemployment remained catastrophically high with no solution visible. The frustrated, educated, unemployed youth represented potential revolutionary force if they concluded that system offered no hope for better future. Economic stagnation meant living standards wouldn't improve for vast majority. Climate change would intensify water crisis, constraining development and agriculture. Population growth would continue exceeding economic growth, diluting resources across larger populations.

The Palestinian-majority's political exclusion was unsustainable long-term. Demographic trends suggested Palestinians would comprise seventy percent of population within decades. Maintaining minority military control over supermajority population required either increasing repression or fundamental political restructuring. Neither option was attractive. Increasing repression risked triggering uprising. Political restructuring would end East Bank dominance, threatening regime foundation.

External support, while currently reliable, could change due to American strategic shifts. If American priorities changed or financial constraints forced aid reductions, Jordan would face crisis. Gulf states' willingness to provide aid depended on oil revenues and political calculations that could shift. International community's support for absorbing refugees was declining globally. Future refugee influxes might not receive same international support.

Regional instability created constant potential for spillover. Syria's unresolved civil war, Iraq's fragile stability, Israeli-Palestinian conflict's periodic eruptions, potential Iranian-Israeli escalation, all posed threats to Jordan. Any major regional crisis could produce refugee flows, economic disruption, security threats, or demand for Jordanian participation that would strain resources beyond capacity.

Climate change's impacts were accelerating. Water scarcity would worsen. Agricultural productivity would decline. Heat waves would increase. These environmental stresses would compound economic and social tensions, potentially triggering crises that overwhelmed coping capacity.

The answer to whether Jordan's system could continue indefinitely was unknowable because it depended on variables Jordan couldn't control: future American policy, Gulf states' wealth and priorities, regional conflict trajectories, climate change impacts, and demographic trends. What was certain was that Jordan would remain weak, poor, dependent, and authoritarian. The question was whether these characteristics would continue providing protective advantages or would eventually prove insufficient against accumulating stresses.

Conclusion: The Mandate's Legacy in 2025

One hundred four years after Winston Churchill met Abdullah in Jerusalem and created Transjordan as expedient solution to British imperial problems, the kingdom survived as testament to power of authoritarian control, external dependence, and strategic irrelevance. Jordan was the mandate system's most improbable success story if success was defined as regime survival rather than popular prosperity or democratic governance.

The structures Britain created in 1921 persisted with remarkable consistency through 2025. External subsidy still funded government operations. A minority still controlled military force keeping majority excluded from power. The economy still depended on income from abroad rather than domestic production. The state still existed to serve external patron interests and internal elite enrichment rather than majority welfare.

But calling this success required ignoring most Jordanians' lived experience. The average young Jordanian in 2025 faced future of unemployment or underemployment, water scarcity, environmental degradation, political exclusion, and diminished expectations. The Palestinian majority experienced systematic discrimination and political marginalization. The poor, whether East Bank or Palestinian, lived in conditions barely improved from their grandparents' generation. The promised development from mandate-era rhetoric had produced modest improvements in education and healthcare but not prosperity, opportunity, or justice.

Jordan's story revealed that the mandate system's greatest achievement was not preparing peoples for self-government, as the League of Nations Covenant claimed. It was creating systems of control that could survive formal independence, operating with indigenous faces implementing structures designed to serve external interests. The British left in 1946. The Americans replaced them. The subsidy continued. The authoritarianism persisted. The poverty remained. The monarchy survived.

For the Bedouin family that opened this study in Part 1, living near Karak in 1914, their descendants in 2025 lived in conditions that were materially better but structurally unchanged. They had electricity, running water, schools, and clinics their ancestors lacked. But they remained subjects of unelected monarch, controlled by security services, dependent on government patronage, excluded from meaningful political participation, and living in poverty that denied them dignity and opportunity.

For the Palestinian refugee family that fled Jaffa in 1948, their descendants in 2025 remained refugees seventy-seven years later. They had Jordanian citizenship, education, and employment opportunities unavailable in other Arab states' refugee camps. But they remained excluded from political power, discriminated against in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, and haunted by stolen homeland they could never return to.

Jordan's century demonstrated that political independence without economic transformation, democratic governance without empowerment of majorities, and formal

sovereignty without genuine autonomy produced stability of a particular kind: stability serving elite minorities and external patrons, not populations. It was stability purchased through poverty that limited stakes in power, authoritarianism that prevented opposition from organizing, and dependence that ensured regime would never threaten patron interests.

This was the mandate system's true legacy: not liberation but modified colonialism, not self-government but managed authoritarianism, not development but permanent underdevelopment, not justice but stability serving external interests. Jordan survived. But survival wasn't triumph. It was the continuation of structures designed to prevent genuine independence from ever occurring.

The question facing Jordan in 2025 was whether this system could persist another century, adapting to new challenges as it had adapted to previous ones, or whether accumulated stresses would finally overwhelm regime's capacity to manage them. The answer remained unknowable. What was certain was that Jordan would remain what it had always been: an artificial state serving external interests, ruled by minority, dependent on subsidy, and surviving through poverty that paradoxically protected it from the catastrophes that destroyed its wealthier neighbors.

One hundred four years after its creation, Jordan endured as reminder that sometimes in history, weakness is strength, poverty is stability, and dependence is survival. This was not the triumph of self-determination and popular sovereignty. This was the triumph of imperial design that proved durable enough to outlast the empire that created it, preserved by those who benefited from it and subsidized by those who found it useful. Jordan was the mandate system's orphan that refused to die. And its survival, purchased at such cost to its people's prosperity and freedom, was the mandate system's final vindication and its greatest condemnation.

END OF PART 4

END OF JORDAN CASE STUDY

Jordan Case Study: Comprehensive Thematic Bibliography

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NOTE ON SOURCES AND BIAS

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Jordanian government sources underreport unemployment, poverty, and political repression. Economic statistics should be cross-referenced with international organization data.

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Recent scholarship increasingly uses declassified documents to challenge official narratives. Works using British, American, and Jordanian archives are most reliable.

This bibliography represents sources consulted and recommended for understanding Jordan's history from Ottoman period through contemporary era. It is organized thematically to facilitate research on specific topics. Researchers should prioritize works using primary archival sources over those relying solely on secondary sources or official government narratives.

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